To serve or not to serve...

It’s a service industry — golf.
The faster everyone learns that, the faster everyone will get healthy. Sobering statistics from the National Golf Foundation (NGF) followed quick on the heels of announcement that the United States opened more than 500 new courses or expansions in 1999. The number of players and those who often play remains flat-lined, the NGF revealed.

Time to apply the defibrillator.

America has turned from a manufacturing country into a service country. Instead of steel mills we have Kinko copiers. Instead of shoes we have Burger Kings. Maybe golf can learn from these other service industries, which appear to be doing very well, thank you.

First, we need to realize golf is in a battle for the disposable income of America — fighting to get people to the first hole instead of the cinema; to the clubhouse restaurant instead of the Wendy’s; to the pro shop instead of the local K-Mart. Where’s the beef? There had better be some, because Americans are willing, and able, to go elsewhere with their money.

I get around the country, see a variety of golf facilities and notice some big differences in how the golfers (shoppers/clients) are treated. Money Hill outside New Orleans? They were there to help with the clubs, friendly at the pro shop, quick at the restaurant. Kemper Lakes in Chicago? The same: courteous, helpful. Pinchurbs? Wow! Yes, upper-class clubs, and what we are calling “high-end daily fee” are, for the most part, doing it right. Treat your customers well. Greet them with a smile; even Wal-Mart does that.

But, in my experience, it seems that the lower-end and middle-of-the-road-daily-fee clubs — those where beginners decide to stick to the game and where most of America can afford to play — should learn a thing or two from the high-enders. Heck, I know two nine-hole courses where the owner/operators appear nonchalant, or even disgruntled, by new arrivals. What would a smile and a “good-day” cost?

One figure from the NGF is particularly disturbing. That is, although about 3 million people take up golf each year, the same number drop out. What would a smile and a “good-day” cost?

Golf course managers must find ways to attract golfers back for a second or third round, for annual membership, for a lifetime.

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We need your help

It’s that time of year again. We are compiling our annual list of golf course management companies and the courses they operate. We plan to publish the list with our June issue.

We started doing this several years ago, calling the management firms we knew about and asking them to provide us a listing of their own, leased and managed facilities.

We were amazed at the response. The people who received that particular issue called to thank us and ask where they might get further information. Many others who hadn’t received the issue apparently heard through the grapevine that we had published it and called to get copies, which we were glad to provide.

Inevitably we’d hear from a couple management firms that felt slighted their courses weren’t listed. Those omissions were never a conscious effort on our part. Rather we usually just didn’t know the company existed.

So, we’re asking for your help.

If you operate a golf course management company, and your firm’s holdings have not been included in our past management company lists, please contact us.

You can forward the information via e-mail to pblais@golfcoursenews.com; or fax to Peter Blais at 207-846-0657; or by mail to Peter Blais, Golf Course News, 106 Lafayette St., Yarmouth, ME 04096.

Thanks for your assistance...”