

Boosting the bottom line



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This year, I introduced you to several insiders and their marketing insights into this wonderful world that is our golf course industry. But looking back on the columns, they all revolve around one common theme: increasing revenue at your facility.

In January, I challenged you to think outside the box with ideas and a marketing formula: The four Ps: price, product, promotion and place (location). The intent was to urge you to think differently about your business and ask your customers what else they might want while they spend five, six or more hours at your golf facility. There are no pat answers or offerings.

Your core business – a golf course product in exchange for green fees and cart fees – is still your most important offering, but could you also provide services in demand without interfering with your core business? Most new revenue-generating ideas will come from your patrons. Ask them what other products or services they'd be willing to pay for while enjoying their time on your golf course.

I've been to progressive public-access golf courses that offer dry cleaning, car detailing, valet parking, business services for Realtors, gift shopping, wireless Internet, vegetarian-only menus, movie pick-up, babysitting, family meals-to-go, grocery pick-up, banking, and a host of other services some people would gladly pay a premium for while they play golf. I'm not saying you need to offer non-golf-related services, just consider the opportunities for your club and patrons.

The time it takes to play the game continues to be a hurdle to incremental

play at most golf courses. Some ingenious operators found creative ways to offer services that save their patrons time while they play. Ask your patrons what they want. If enough say the same thing, offer it.

In February's column, I addressed aggregate rounds. Too many sources with not enough information were consistently reporting rounds were down month after month. Since 2003, I found, in most markets, individual courses reported rounds had been stagnant or declined. But that wasn't so for the market as a whole. In most markets, new courses were added or additions were made to existing courses, which dilutes rounds played per hole. Know how your market is faring with aggregate rounds to prepare your upcoming marketing strategies.

In March, Stuart Lindsay with Edgehill Consulting/Pelucid enlightened us on the projected positive effect Baby Boomers will have on the increase of rounds played in the future. He also questioned the effect Gen-Xers are projected to have, which isn't as good as the Boomers' effect.

In April, I discussed how to hire a consultant. If you're thinking about hiring a consultant, review the column online, print it and save it. My observations can help you find a qualified consultant.

May's column was more than an introduction to e-marketing. Phil Wiggins, owner of Wiggins' Golf Consulting, was a valuable resource. If you've resolved to get more involved with e-marketing, he has some great ideas.

But possibly the best marketing suggestions for generating revenue were detailed in my July column. The best resource you have for making relevant decisions to increase revenue will come from your patrons. Involve them and ask them for their assistance via formal member surveys and player surveys. I gave you specific instructions of how to conduct both, along with the topics to be included in each survey. If you aren't surveying your patrons, you might be making critical business decisions blindly.

For my August column, I summarized some concise marketing thoughts about

player development curriculums. That I had e-mailed to clients, past clients and a few industry insiders. Mike Kahn, owner of GolfMAK wrote back curtly: "We need 1,000 new courses or get rid of 3,000." He piqued my marketing curiosity, and subsequently I had a two-hour brunch with him. Almost the entire column is a compilation of his thoughts about introducing players to the game. Mike is a 50-year industry veteran. I respect his differing opinions, and I hope you did, too.

My October column was actually a continuation of September's column. If you retrieve these two columns from the GCN archives online and read them together, they'll provide you with plenty of course positioning, branding, revenue-generating

and promotion ideas for next year.

As we close 2006, I hope you notice a continuing thread throughout these marketing columns: The most successful operators I've had

the chance to assist are those who realize they have to view their golf facility as more than a golf course, pro shop, restaurant and driving range. It's a recreation, entertainment and customer service business. Your business. For the most part, you have a captive audience, or one that can be captured, if you do everything possible to make their experience at your club more endearing. To do so in today's environment of competing recreational interests and time-challenged patrons, you most likely will need to think outside the box and provide them with what they want or need make it easy for them to play golf more often – at your course instead of your competition's.

Can you think about your golf facility as a business rather than a golf course? If your customer is going to, say, have breakfast, warm up, play golf, divvy up the bets over lunch and maybe have a beer or two with good friends, he'll be spending six or seven hours at your place of business. How might you provide your customers the comfort to stay that long? Think customer service. At first glance that "service" might not appear to be about golf. But think again. It's all about golf. It's all about your business. GCN

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Think outside the box

Here's an exercise that might help you think outside the box. Place a pen on one of the dots and without lifting your pen, draw four straight lines that will connect all the dots. For the solution, turn to page 49.

