he days of wondering whether that was light at the end of the tunnel or a train bearing down on us finally may be over. After attending the PGA Merchandise Show, the Golf Industry Show and the CMAA World Conference, I’m feeling some of the optimism that filled the aisles at those events. But before we get too giddy, let’s ask ourselves: “How do we tap into the upswing and how do we make sure the momentum continues to build?”

First, a little reality. Most golf businesses are only beginning their recovery. There will be continued vulnerability and volatility in some segments for some time. The tender nature of this recovery requires that business practices such as golf and club marketing, access (for memberships and tee times) and course conditioning must be kept simple and easy to use.

However, evidence supports a recovery beyond that, which inevitably surfaces at trade shows and conferences. In its 2013 study of golfer consumer attitudes, Sports and Leisure Research Group notes a shift in golfing consumers. “After a post-recession flatness, U.S. golfers appear more poised to play and spend on golf than they have in the past three years,” says SLRG president Jon Last.

Manufacturers will be among the beneficiaries. According to Last, irons, balls, apparel and drivers will see an uptick. SLRG also forecasts a favorable swing in sales of shoes and golf bags.

Golf course architects and builders note that new projects finally are hitting the drawing boards. There is no indication that new courses will exceed the number of closures in 2013; it’s likely that we will see the eighth consecutive year of decline in golf course supply. But the steepness of the decline is declining, which may be a good or a bad trend, depending on your perspective and how far you think we need to go to restore the supply/demand balance.

Listening to CMAA members at the World Conference in San Diego, it’s obvious many are anticipating increased membership demand. In fact, Steven Graves, president of Creative Golf Marketing, notes membership sales at strong clubs increased – with joining fees recalibrated to market rates – throughout 2012. The preferred categories for new members in for each touch point. Turning a surface ripple of opportunity into a genuine wave requires that all stakeholders invite return participation to expand golf’s numbers. This is a time during which we all must be engaged in growing the game.

Sustained commitment to recovery is the key. Many influences external to golf and club categories are at work; but people involved in golf-related business will have a direct influence on the continued recovery of golf and

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