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The golf professional is facing more competition than ever before from volume sporting goods dealers, who are making commercial-line golf equipment look increasingly attractive through one marketing technique—discount pricing.

The golf professional cannot, nor should he ever try to, compete with the discount stores on the basis of price. Instead, he should refine and concentrate on the diagnostic or prescription approach to the sale of golf clubs.

The golf professional is more than a clerk selling woods, irons, putters and utility clubs. Because of his training and background, he is eminently more qualified to fit a customer properly with a set of clubs than is a sporting goods clerk, who may be selling clubs one minute and camping stoves the next. The golf professional can take advantage of this weakness in his competitor’s sales approach.

Most golfers can’t analyze their own swings; that’s like trying to hear yourself talk without a tape recorder. Few sporting goods sales personnel can analyze a golfer’s swing. Only the golf professional has the necessary qualifications and expertise. This expertise is his strength.

When you need a pair of glasses or new lenses, you don’t wander into a store and ask the salesperson to show you something that might be right for you. You go to an ophthalmologist or an optometrist, who examines your eyes and prescribes the proper corrective lenses. Then you have your lenses made exactly according to the doctor’s prescription.

The same holds true in the selection of golf clubs. Prescribing the proper shaft flex, length, swing weight, grip size and type of club and then melding these ingredients into the proper clubs for your customer requires the services of a diagnostician, not a clerk.

The professional, whether he works at a private club, public course or driving range, who approaches each potential sale as a diagnostician, has a much better chance to make the sale and help the player.

Let’s examine how the diagnostic method works.

Unless the professional is familiar with the customer’s swing, he takes the golfer onto the practice tee, where his swing can be studied. There are two reasons for this move. The practice tee is a merchandising tool unique to the pro shop. There usually is a marked difference in the way a person swings a club indoors and the way he actually swings when hitting a ball from the tee or turf.

While the customer is hitting practice shots, the professional is able to watch for the following essential characteristics: 1) How the customer stands up to the ball, which will determine the loft characteristics he will need in his new clubs; 2) How the customer holds the club, which will determine the grip size; 3) How the customer swings, which determines the flex of the shaft. For example, even though a player may be in his 60s, if he has a short, choppy swing, he still needs a stiff shaft to play his best game.

Once the professional diagnoses the foregoing points and considers the person’s age, weight, strength and frequency of play, he then can make an intelligent recommendation on new clubs that will improve the customer’s game.

This recommendation represents a personalized service to the customer—a service that will more than justify the higher prices a professional must charge.

Once the recommendation has been made, the professional must close the sale. The best way is to fit the customer immediately with the correct set of clubs from the shop inventory. (It goes without saying that the professional must carry an inventory substantial enough to meet most needs: a selection of both regular and stiff shafts in long and short lengths as well as in standard lengths.)

If the professional thinks that the customer will benefit best by clubs continued on page 57
made to special order, he must explain this to the customer and encourage him to wait a reasonable amount of time while his clubs are being made to the specific measurements.

KEEPING UP WITH THE TIMES
The golf equipment industry is not static; each year, new concepts and innovations are introduced to it. If the professional is to maintain his superiority over the sporting goods store, he must keep up with the changes; must know what each new club has been designed to do and how each new line of clubs can aid the golfer.

For example, some golf clubs now selling on the market are specifically designed to help the high handicapper lower his scores. Other clubs benefit the low handicapper, who is more interested in adding distance to his already excellent accuracy.

The professional can keep abreast of innovative techniques used in design and in the manufacturing process by attending the Professional Golfers' Assn. Merchandise Show, where major club makers, with their sales representatives, display their equipment. The professional can also visit his suppliers' factories to see firsthand how the clubs are made. Often, on these visits, the professional can pick up valuable information which will help him in his sales approach.

Because the professional's livelihood depends on his ability as a diagnostician and because information is vital to him, he should insist on being kept technically informed by his suppliers through newsletters or sales representatives. The manufacturer, in turn, should recognize his obligations to the professional and be willing to accept the role of informant. Ultimately, both will benefit.

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