

Ways to Boost Club Income

Here are revenue-producing ideas that are inexpensive and effective
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Not too long ago our firm was contacted by a suburban Washington, D.C., country club. The problem at the club was far from unique: lack of members or, stated another way, lack of income. It's a tough position to be in, because usually it takes money to make money. Once a club gets itself into a negative position, raising funds becomes difficult.

The goal we set for the club, therefore, was to develop a list of inexpensive, but effective, promotional programs designed to renew interest on the part of current members, bring in new members and boost profits.

The list that follows was tailor made for the particular club involved: 27 holes, small clubhouse, even smaller snack bar/dining room, plus a pro shop. Privately owned and semi-private, the club is in reasonably good condition. To help you make sense out of the suggestions, we've rephrased them into instructional segments for you to apply to your own circumstances.

MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN

The least expensive, and perhaps most effective, membership campaign is called "every member get a member." It involves encouraging members to bring in the prospects. One inducement often used is to give every prospective member accompanied by a member a free round. An inducement for the members could be a dozen golf balls for each member brought in and series of awards for year-end presentation, such as a new set of clubs for the biggest producer as well as other ideas discussed later on. To get the message home, be sure to develop plenty of "point of purchase" signs throughout the clubhouse and the pro shop reminding members of the program and encouraging them

to participate.

STRUCTURE MEMBERS

We suggest investigating membership categories. The more diverse they are, the more capable the club is of attracting those members who want a plan to fit their needs and pocketbooks. A few suggestions include:

Family membership: allows use of all facilities to all family members any time;

Limited family membership: use of certain facilities to certain family members at certain times; for example, father and mother playing golf only on the weekends, but kids in the pool any time;

Single membership: use of all facilities at any time by an individual;

Limited single membership: use of certain facilities at certain times by an individual;

Weekday memberships: for families or individuals;

Junior memberships: for those 18 and under;

Senior citizen memberships: for those 65 and over;

Pool memberships;

Tennis memberships.

The attitude that the club should promote is, "We want you to use and enjoy our facilities, and we're going to do everything possible to help you do it."

SUGGESTION BOX PROGRAM

Suggestion box programs are as old as the hills, but they linger on for good reason. They work. Not only do they give members and employees an opportunity to contribute their thoughts and gripes, but they also are a source for some good ideas. For employees, at least, consider rewarding those whose suggestions result in improvements. To make the program work, be



certain to read each suggestion and reply directly to whoever offered it, indicating thanks for interest, enthusiasm, ways in which the suggestion can be implemented, why the suggestion won't work, and so on.

UTILIZE INSIDE SPACE

Utilize interior space as much as possible. An area that you may use now to stack extra chairs, for example, could be used to hold a coin-operated



bumper pool table or a coin-operated bowling game, or perhaps it could be turned into a sauna bath, card room or exercise area.

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FOURSOME FINDER

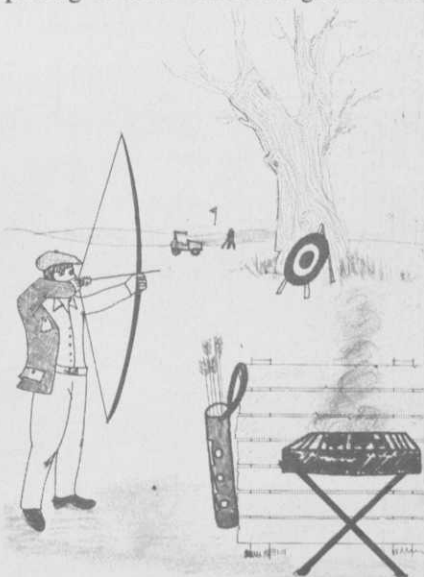
People who want to get into a foursome or threesomes looking for a fourth could be instructed to leave their names at your office. Then you can do your best to get people and foursomes together. It's an easy service to provide, but can have very positive effects.

SPECIAL EVENTS SPACE

Special events are always good, such as a beer blast (pay for food, club provides all the beer), cook-out, and so on. Although you may not have the facilities, you can very easily rent or purchase a large tent to hold all the people. It becomes, more or less, an "instant clubhouse."

USE EXTRA SPACE OUTSIDE

If your club is surrounded by heavily wooded area, consider using it. For example, do you have the room to put in an archery range? It's an easy enough addition to club facilities, and the cost is purely minimal. What about putting in some barbecue grills to let



members come for family picnics and outings, fishing? Near an historical site? Investigate the possibility of purchasing some inexpensive mine detectors for rental to members who can go out looking for buried relics. Also check into the feasibility of having bicycle or minibike trails, or easily moved ping pong tables. In essence, use your imagination. Put an unused outside area to use.

TIE-INS WITH AREA COMPANIES

If you have any large organizations in

your area, pay a visit to the personnel director or a corporate officer. What about offering a block of memberships to employees at a discount or reduced green fee and/or car rate? You may wish to tie in with an offering of a special tournament for employees. It's good for the company. It's good for you.

TIE-INS WITH NEW HOUSING

If you live in an area where new communities are being built, even a trailer home community, talk to the builders. Perhaps they would be willing to buy a block of memberships and include one membership with each home sold or at least be willing to offer them at a discount to persons purchasing new homes.

TEAMS

Do any area high schools or colleges have golf teams? If not, could you encourage their formation? And if they do and are not playing on your course, could you offer a discount to teams? What about general discounts for all area educators? It could be a chance for some very good income, especially on those days when the course is not being used heavily.

CHARITABLE GROUP TIE-IN

Approach a charitable fund-raising group and see if it would be willing to sell membership in your club to its members. A church group, for example, could receive a donation from you for each membership sold.

TOURIST TIE-IN

Investigate the possibility of tying in with area tourist bureaus to offer tourists special discounts on the club course or just the opportunity to play. In a similar manner, you may be able to create a tie-in with several area hotels or motels, and may even be able to arrange special tournaments for groups of persons attending conventions in your area.

BOOST MEMBERSHIP INDUCEMENTS

Boost membership inducements with items such as several free lessons with membership (for which the pro could be reimbursed at a low rate) or a dozen golf balls, a new putter, and so on.

FRONT-LOADED DUES

Because most people hate to pay for

something they don't have, consider structuring dues payments so they are paid completely during the golfing season. Members then have to pay nothing over the winter. For example, eight monthly payments of \$30 instead of 12 at \$20.

BUYING SERVICE FOR MEMBERS

Investigate the possibility of a buying service for members. Buying services are now established in many areas of the nation. They work by getting rebates from suppliers and distributors on items such as automobiles, campers, tires, batteries, furniture and major appliances. See if there's one in your area that will provide these kinds of discounts to members of your club. If not, survey the membership. Are there any members who could provide goods or services to members at a discount? The service costs the club nothing, but it's very much appreciated by members and, of course, represents something lost if membership is allowed to lapse.

DAY CARE

Look into the possibility of having a small, but well-run day care center for



mothers who want to play golf but need a babysitter. It's convenient for the women and may even generate a profit.

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Consider developing a monthly newsletter for members. It will cost far less than you think for a neatly typed publication and creates an excellent sense of intimacy while providing news of club activities. You even may be able to sell ad space or run ads for your pro shop.

continued

BOOST INCOME continued

CLUB BULLETIN BOARD

Create a club bulletin board for members' use. They can put up notices of club, civic or other group happenings or personal advertisements.

OFF-SEASON EVENTS

If you do have a winter which prohibits golfing and use of most other facilities, try to stir up action and income through use of what *can* be used. As an example, consider having an "Apres Ski Party" without the skiing.

PROMOTE CHRISTMAS SPECIALS

Cash in on Christmas—everyone else does. Make up a mailer to members detailing specials at the pro shop. You may even want to create a special three-month membership to be given by a member as a gift.

POOL RENTALS

Do you have a swimming pool? If so, consider renting it out to private parties at night and perhaps even catering these parties. All that it takes to get something like this started is asking members if they are interested. Sell a

few parties and then you're in business. The same can be applied if you have tennis courts or similar facilities.

CREDIT CARDS

Help along the cashless society concept by having either your own charge system or accepting a bank card. A charge card could be used for paying initiation fees and dues.

REFRESHMENT TRUCK

Would it be possible to buy a truck to be outfitted for sales of liquor, beer, wine, soft drinks or whatever for strategic placement around the sixth or 13th hole at least on weekends? It's a nice convenience for members and could be a substantial money-maker. Similarly, a cart could be used for drink service around a pool or the tennis courts.

GRAFFITI BOARDS

Consider putting up a special graffiti board in your locker room or bathrooms. It can be as simple as a blackboard and chalk and allows doodlers to write to their heart's content. It's interesting; keeps writing off walls and can

be erased as frequently as needed.

NAMING OF HOLES

In addition to having just a "17th hole," for example, consider giving a name to each hole. It could be something like "17—The Terrible Twister," or it could be named after an individual, for example "17—Harry Wilson's Folly." In fact, you may consider naming of holes after individuals who bring in the most amount of members in an "every member get a member" campaign, and perhaps changing the names each year. In this way, you can add both interest and incentive, all at virtually no cost.

TOURNAMENTS

In order to spark more interest, consider running tournaments every weekend of the season, with virtually anyone playing being eligible for some sort of prize. You can name the tournaments after U.S. Presidents, starting with Washington, or perhaps in honor of certain club members, again, considering those who bring in most members in an "every member get a member" campaign.

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COMMITTEES

Have your members do some work for you! If you don't have one already, establish at least an Events Committee which can come up with activities that will be enjoyed by one and all. A special Ladies Committee could be set up to establish good activities to spark ladies' interest. A Membership Committee could develop strategies for bringing in new members.

FOOD SERVICE

Examine food service carefully. Is it sufficient? Can you serve something other than hamburgers and hot dogs? Do you have a snack bar in an appropriate place? Are dirty menus discarded? Could you institute a special "golfer's breakfast" for weekend players, perhaps including a Bloody Mary or something similar? If the food is good—and it better be—is it served attractively? Could you have a special Sunday morning smorgasbord? Does the menu describe food in an appetizing manner, for example, "one-quarter pound of delicious, sizzling choice ground tenderloin, grilled to your specifications and served with

garden fresh lettuce and sliced tomato," instead of "hamburger?" In other words, consider your food service as a good source of income, not just as something available. It not only can generate profit in and of itself, but it also can provide another reason why members remain members. And the same applies to cocktail service. Can you use special glasses rather than the typical? Do you serve nuts, chips and other dry hors d'oeuvres, or even hot hors d'oeuvres on a complimentary basis, and so on.

IMAGE CONTROL

Strive to develop a uniform image. Develop a standard logo for the name of your club and be sure it appears on everything connected with the club, from signs and stationery to business cards, billing forms, newsletter, caps, club mittens, score cards and hole flags. If you use certain colors, be sure they appear on everything, too, rather than just a random mish-mash array. By standardizing logo and colors, it is far easier to establish an instant identity whenever anything connected with your club is seen.

GENERAL EVALUATIONS

On at least a monthly basis, someone with a critical eye and not afraid to speak his or her mind should make a complete survey of the club, inspecting everything. Is the clubhouse kept attractive and appealing? Is the pro shop in good condition? Are signs on the doors uniform and attractive? Is outdoor furniture in a good state of repair? In other words, view the club as a prospective member might view it. By performing continual preventive maintenance and repair you will not only keep the club in good shape, and so protect your investment, but you'll also have a good looking club, one which people will be attracted to and will enjoy being involved with.

SIGNAGE

It's imperative that the course have at least two signs on the roadway, for traffic coming in either direction. The signs should be attractive and must be kept attractive. Consider developing signs that will allow you to tack up large notices of coming events, such as PRESIDENT'S TOURNAMENT

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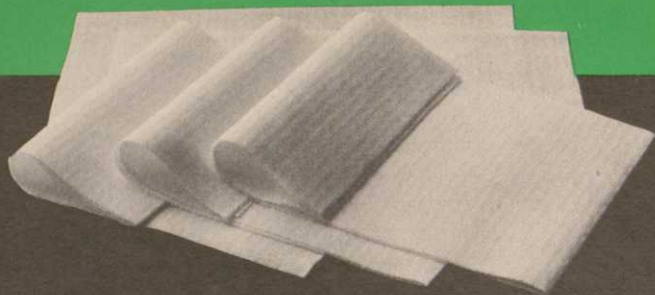
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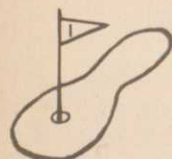
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THIS WEEKEND. If you do tack up notices on the signs, be sure they are kept current.

PUBLICITY

Everything you do that is noteworthy, including development of any new program or gimmick, should be covered by a news release sent out to the sports desks of area daily newspapers, editors of local weekly newspapers and magazines, and news assignment editors of area television and radio stations. If you have something that you think is particularly worthwhile, call an editor beforehand to see if he may be willing to send out someone to cover it in person. In return, you should grant an exclusive, meaning that you will notify no one else of the item at least until after that editor has the story aired or published. If possible, submit captioned photos with each release, because they increase your chances of coverage. Do not expect all media to pick up the story, but don't try to guess which will and which won't. Compile a news media listing and mail releases to the full list. The more releases you get out and get published, the more you will appear before the public, a major goal of any promotional program.

To be sure, the above list is very minimal and requires adaption to individual circumstances. What it does indicate, however, is that there are a variety of imaginative and very low cost—some no cost—programs which can be undertaken to boost member and prospective member interest, get the course talked about, make membership in your club a refreshing, fun experience, and, in general, boost income and profits. Above all, it attempts to prove an old adage that ideas are precious, providing you do more than just think about them. So, two closing pieces of advice. First, keep with you at all times a little notebook in which you can jot down ideas—those that just pop into your head, and those which you can get by observing what others are doing. Second, take action on your ideas. If you can't do it yourself, then see to it that someone else does. Although you can't expect that everything you do will enjoy immediate success, or even will ever be successful, you will never have a chance to succeed if you don't try. □