

# IMPULSE BUYING

## Planning makes it work for you

A two-brother team from Yonkers, N.Y. has been operating the Torrey Pines Pro Shop in San Diego, Cal. for several years now, and their conclusion is that the public course customer is high on impulse.

"You have your regulars, of course," said Willie Wansa, who shares the inside and outside duties with his brother Pete, "but you're competing much more strongly with the downtown sporting goods stores than if you had these people tied to a country club. I guess we have to count on impulse buying for about 75 percent of the sales. Quite a few people know that they need a pair of gloves or some balls, but it's only when they get right here, that they remember they didn't pick it up elsewhere. Our merchandising story is to show the people what we've got."

Torrey Pines has a 12-month season. It opens at 6:30 a.m. and runs through to about 9 p.m. on weekdays, and opens at 5:30 a.m. on weekends and holidays, closing around 9 p.m. at nightfall. The club was built in the mid-50s with a south and a north course. They are both regulation size championship courses, with the north being about four yards shorter. The San Diego Open has used the courses for the last six years.

The pro shop requires two shifts because of the long day, and the

Wansa brothers employ about 13 people to handle inside sales and jobs. Torrey Pines also has 80 Harley Davidson gasoline carts with three men taking care of them. There are also four men for the driving range who service the carts in their spare time.

"We want them looking clean and sparkling," Wansa says about the carts. "It helps to maintain an overall impression."

Wansa suffers from a problem heard from many other pros.

"Our shop is much too small," he said. "The actual display area is only 30' x 30'. We have a 9' x 12' office, and another area about 15' x 15' where we rent the sets and have the repair shop. But we can hit 580 people here a day without any blinking. Our tops was 819 people about four years ago. But we also had one year the course was closed for 18 straight days because of rain."

This combination of small display area combined with large traffic flow means that Wansa has to be innovative when it comes to getting as much merchandise out on the shelves as possible.

"Every nook and corner has something in it," Wansa says. "We have to substitute a full shelf for elegance at times. Take out our cash register. We've got it surrounded with impulse items. Also, we have a

lot of signs around here as well. Not only for merchandise — to attract people to specific merchandise with price, but also to try to make them chuckle."

Wansa said that when he placed a sign over the tees saying, "10 cents a dozen or 12 for a dime," people stopped, read and bought.

"I can't give you specific figures," he said, "because this was a while ago, but immediately our sales went up. It happens like this all the time. We're not trying for the big laugh. Just something to put the customer into a pleasant mood, and buy something that he needs but could put off if we didn't remind him about it in a pleasant way."

When it comes to the merchandise, Wansa has to buy differently from the country club course.

"Our customers are interested in getting out there and playing, rather than in how well they look. They want to be stylish, but I never have to worry about high fashion. We carry basic and solid lines, especially the better-known brand names. In fact, some of these brand names have to carry the weight of the sale at times, simply because the name will attract the customer."

Wille Wansa's wife does the buying for the women's clothing category; he handles the men and the

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clubs and the equipment. They go to the Merchandise Mart in Los Angeles about twice a year, but rely upon salesmen who call for fill-ins and re-orders. The salesmen are used as allies by the Wansas, and he suggests that other pro shops might do the same.

"We listen a great deal to what they are saying," he said. "I know a lot of salesmen can run off at times, but we have found that if we play it straight with them, they'll do the same. A salesman only has to overload you once you know."

Wansa gives as an example a new styling in slacks. The salesman brings the news; Wansa likes it. He talks it over with the people right in the shop.

"They're out on the floor doing the selling," he said. "I don't let it be a one-man decision because they know what's going on out there just as I do."

Once the decision is made to take on the line, Wansa turns to the sales-

man to learn the color mix which is going over elsewhere. He bases sizes on his own historical data.

"But we have wide range," he adds. "Ours is a big tourist trade as well. We get year-round visitors in San Diego, and the course is well-known."

Wansa buys in quantity. For example, he handles Ratner slacks, with which he has had success. "We bought 126 pairs on one initial order," he said. "That included sizes and colors. Then every time the salesman comes around, he takes the order for fill-in. As long as that style is selling, we want to keep it in stock."

As might be expected, Wansa keeps a fairly close tab on merchandise turn.

"We don't allow anything to sit and wait around here," he said. "We can't really afford to; there's too much else."

Torrey Pines will carry the item for four months, giving it floor exposure. If the merchandise does not move quickly — at least half of the initial order, but often depending upon the price range — Wansa puts it on sale. The first discount is 20 percent, and then it falls to 25 percent. The shop has had good experience with its sale merchandise, and seldom goes below that mark-down. However, Wansa would have no qualms about knocking the price down further if necessary.

"Anything that doesn't sell," he points out, "is taking up the space of anything that does sell."

In terms of buying and pricing, he also finds that close outs are a good means of attracting attention. He carries all the top brand name clubs, for instance. And in addition to the top lines, he will also look for their closeouts that are selling 20 percent discounted. Wansa finds that his turn increases ever time these lines go up — not only of the discounted items, but also of the non-mark-down merchandise. He places the two right next to each other (or as near as feasible), on the assumption that he can trade up a customer who needs clubs, and a customer who has a full complement might still be interested because of the sale attraction.

Having a well-known driving range helps Wansa in merchandising clubs.

"I think selling a set needs a lot of hand holding," he said. "We have a dual problem. We have to give a person a lot of time to make a decision while at the same time make the sale the first time around because of the nature of our customers."

Wansa has resolved the question in favor of hand holding. "We take them up to the driving range, and we just work out with them. No club will hit the ball by itself. You have to demonstrate weight and shift and style. They get much more than a demonstration because we watch them while they swing. We can sell them a set that matches what they're doing or what they should be doing. Sometimes they end up getting a full-scale lesson."

But that does not worry Wansa. "Never. The time is well-spent. We're fighting a lot of competition. We could lose almost 75 percent of the traffic because they can go right by us because of the way the shop is located. So we have to make certain they know about us. And word of mouth is important. They have to know about our highly personal service, the time we spend with them, and the merchandise we have available. I think we have more sales people per customer than you find on the private courses."

This is especially evident on the floor. Wansa keeps very little for backup stock. Almost all the merchandise is placed out front upon delivery. When a customer comes in, and seems to be wandering, one of the sales people will go over, and ask to help. If the answer is "just looking," Wansa suggests a ploy that might help other pro shops.

"We just pick up some merchandise and begin to start talking about it. In that way, we can start finding out what the customer is really about, if there are any needs, or what have you."

While Wansa encourages browsing, he believes that in a small shop such as Torrey Pines, it could be possible for a customer to make up his or her mind within 15 minutes if there is anything of interest.

Wansa returns to his other theme about the impulse buyer.

"That's where display comes in. We try to make everything attractive," he said. "But mass is of great importance to us."

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last year, there were 72 youngsters enrolled. The series of lessons are given every Tuesday for an hour, and this is followed up on Friday when the youngsters are teamed up according to ability and then age. The younger ones usually play one or two holes, but some of the older ones will go nine or 18.

Their scores become important as an indication of their ability, obviously, but Limback and Toler do not beat them with it. At the end of the year, however, they run a junior tournament according to ability, and there are trophies and prizes in addition to door prizes for everyone. Another important aspect in the junior tournament is the annual banquet which is held at the club, and is keyed to a younger level, although formal in its appearance.

Tanglewood is a busy course, and the shop is kept busy with the in-and-out traffic. During the summer, there will be seven or eight employees including the pro and assistant pro. Hours usually are from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., six days a week, closed on Monday. Canteen help is separate, but there is a strong walk-through traffic which Limback naturally encourages. In fact, the merchandise in the pro shop can be seen from the canteen so that individuals sitting at the tables can peruse the merchandise, and then afterwards go up to the racks.

How does Limback view it all?

"I think it's a matter of getting to know your people," he said. "It's difficult to set down hard and fast rules. But I think it's important that your customers feel that the pro shop is a friendly place first of all, and then, of course, that you have the merchandise. You can't keep showing the same thing in the same place. Don't forget that we're competing against downtown and shopping center stores that thrive on merchandising techniques. We've got to show the members that we can go one better."

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Empty golf bags are hung from the window, for example, in order to make use of an otherwise "empty" space. In order to display caps and hats, Wansa puts one on top of a headless mannequin that is displaying a shirt. In cases where wall shelves do not come down to the floor, golf clubs, golf carts, and other floor merchandise are placed under the shelves to utilize that space as well.

Wansa does a big trade with caps and hats, and he believes that other pro shops could work this category into a solid add-on sale.

"We have them all over," he said.

"All different styles. The idea is that everyone should have a cap or hat, and that everyone can have something different."

As a result, he has one entire section of valuable wall space given over to caps. He reasons that a woman or man might not come in and want a golf outfit of slacks and shirt or blouse, but that everyone will pick up a hat.

"That's what we mean when we say we have an impulse customer," he said. "But then again — and I think this is important — every customer in every pro shop is really an impulse customer."

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