





## Master Of Merchandise

It is rainy and cold this morning as Cincinnati wakes up to another day. The last thing you'd think anybody would be talking about in the dead of winter would be golf. But someone is.

A good two or three months before his peak playing time, Bob Foppe is patiently planning. Sorting carefully his proven routes, Foppe is preparing to move out merchandise that has yet to arrive in his pro shop.

Maybe one of the best merchandising pros in the country, Bob Foppe has logged 10 steady years at Kenwood Country Club, an attractive operation located on the city's northeast side. His expertise in his own field is backed up by his peers in the Southern Ohio section of the PGA, who recently elected him their pro of the year. Foppe is as good a student of merchandising, as he is a teacher. Lately, the latter has become his forte, turning out qualified assistant pros with the regularity of the seasons.

Maintaining price and service have been the two rules of Kenwood's shop under its current occupant. Foppe has mastered the art of giving his members a good price and is still able to show a profit in the shop year in and year out. Basing his philosophy on knowing his clientele, Foppe has maintained his edge as a buyer.

"It's imperative that the pro plan his buying power today. Selecting the right merchandise for the membership is one of the most important steps in making sales. It isn't hard to estimate the average income of the club and in this way you can pretty much anticipate what to buy.

"For example, it might be more advantageous to buy \$25 slacks instead of \$18 ones, based on the buying habits of the members. For the most part, you attempt to sell the member the exclusivity of the shop. If he sees merchandise priced the same at a retail outlet, there is a good chance that he might buy there and there goes a sale," Foppe said.

Attempting to buy for the entire year is another common mistake that Foppe feels a lot of pros make. Manufacturers come out with new merchandise several times during the year and if a pro is stuck with old goods, it's tough for them to stay current with the market. Patience is an important virtue to have in the shop. Often, if the buyer waits till later in the year to purchase, he may get lower prices on certain items from salesmen cashing in on a greater number of closeout opportunities.

Foppe maintains that the wise use of closeouts can aid in moving slow merchandise and at the same time help in turning over inventory quicker. For instance, closeout merchandise can be purchased at such low prices that a pro can offer "Two for One" sales and thus better the prospects of bringing more customers into his store.

Understanding these principles plus knowing the basics of business are essential in being successful, Foppe notes. "Many companies give extended terms on merchandise, simply because they would rather have their product out in the marketplace with a chance at being purchased. Another advantage to them is not having to pay warehousing costs," remarked Foppe.

Selling starts not only in the shop, but on the course, according to Kenwood's pro. New members need to be looked out for and by taking this initiative, the pro can eventually build up a trust between himself and the member. This can easily transfer to the pro shop and added sales. At Kenwood, Foppe feels it's his duty to make sure the new member is happy and content in their environment.

Offering a four-point plan for the new member, Foppe begins right off the bat to show that the club cares. At the core of the program is the pro's ability to arrange games for the new member. In this way, the

member doesn't have to worry about stimulating his own play and is introduced to other members right away. After the initial welcome, Foppe makes it clear to the member that he or a member of his staff will always be available for lessons. Although, he doesn't necessarily think of it as a profit item, Foppe regards club cleaning and repair an additional service that a pro should not disregard. "There is nothing more meaningful to a member than to see someone take the time to make sure his clubs are well taken care of.

"This is an important attitude that the shop staff must reflect. During the winter, when club storage is at its peak, there is time to take care of the member's clubs properly. Nothing is more appreciated by the member, than to come back after a long winter and see that the clubs in his bag are ready to play," Foppe commented.

Finally, Foppe tries to keep up on other places to play in areas that his membership could visit for business or leisure reasons during the year. While teaching golf in schools in several areas of the country, Foppe meets other pros and gathers information on their courses. Keeping a file of the different spots around the country, the pro can aid his membership on where to play on their different trips.

Besides these services there are a variety of ways to keep the customers happy. One promotion that worked quite well at Kenwood was a tournament sponsored by the local distributors of a national distillery. Since these companies do a lot of business with the club, Foppe inquired about the possibility of the distributor putting up the prizes in a weekly tourney.

A case of the liquid refreshment was put up along with other prizes and a \$2 entry fee was charged for each participant. This type operation is an example of the pro shop running a profitable tournament for itself. Since the distributor put up the prizes, that was one less worry for the head pro and in the same regard the distributor did some public relations work for his product.

Cooperation pervades the Kenwood atmosphere. Foppe has

good rapport with his club manager and superintendent. This is illustrated in the golf car operation. Although, Foppe's shop doesn't get a percentage of the car business, he acts as a middleman between the membership and the superintendents staff, who service the cars. "Our part of the club sees the car user every day. We find out the complaints on the vehicles and turn them into the superintendent. I realize that the car is another extension of the club's service. They help create an attitude," Foppe explained. Cars are indeed an intricate part of the Kenwood facility, since the course offers 100 percent car paths, never losing a day of play in wet weather.

Times are changing for the pro and Foppe is the first to admit it. As the face of the game and its economy alter, the subsequent income of the pro will be readjusted. Looking over his entire intake individually, Foppe has 50 percent of his total divided equally in shop sales and club repair. A combination of club subsidy for related help and salary make up 30 percent, while 10 percent each is set in lessons and miscellaneous, such as speaking engagements, rounding out the remainder.

Continually maintaining his service theory, Foppe reasserts that the principle is the first order of business in his pro shop. "One thing that the pro has to do to be successful in this business, is be more conscious of his member's game than his own. Too many pros are concerned with their own play and then can't figure out why they suffer at the cash register. A decision has to be made whether a pro is going to be a golfer or a merchandiser. You can't have both."

When one of his own assistants ventures out into the world on their own, Foppe is there with some advice and some needed inventory. Some accumulated knowledge and a little extra merchandise can better the odds for the young pro starting out.

Unselfish with his own thoughts on business, Foppe is ready to help any friend with a new idea or an old one. Ideas are whirling in the dead of winter in Kenwood's shop, as patient planning awaits the spring onrush of customers. □