

## Softgoods stand alone in pro shop profits

by Nick Romano, managing editor

*Color, lighting and innovative display ideas all work together to give the pro the inside track to profit with softgoods. At Marriott's Lincolnshire Resort, near Chicago, assistant professional Henry DeLozier confers with head pro Roger Maxwell on which colors will be emphasized in the week's display.*





Since the slowdown of the hardgoods market in 1973, golf apparel in the form of slacks, shirts, sweaters, and shoes seems to have taken over as the top money maker in the pro shop. Continued market fluctuation has left the pro, in many cases, dealing away his hardgoods profits. But markup remains high on softgoods, and the pro does not have to do much to do well with them, except purchase wisely and utilize smart merchandising and display techniques.

So much has been written about the steps to take after the merchandise arrives in the shop that basic fundamentals of the softgoods business seem to go ignored. Specialized product knowledge that the pro really needs is not emphasized by many in this industry. Being aware of the fea-

Slack structure is a significant factor in getting your customer or member to realize quality in construction. For strength, pockets must all be sewn, turned, and double-stitched; corners should be bar-tacked; and front pockets reinforced along the side seam. Most slacks today feature a western cut, giving the pockets a full top for a fashionable look. Little extras like a change pocket can be included in the slack, holding coins and preventing jingling.

Even the zipper has to be of good quality, matching slack color. Belt loops are important. Check whether the front loop is lined for stability, with the loop sewn into the waist for strength.

Several criteria measure the quality of the slack. The fabric has to look

slacks is probably incompatible with the other slack elements.

Creases must be sharp and should remain in the garment throughout its life. Back seat seams must be stitched with stronger thread and a chain stitch for give. Again, the zipper area is critical; it must remain flat and smooth. A one-piece fly will give the best results.

Buttons should always be double-stitched, sewn on twice and knotted twice. Assuring that buttons will not fall off for the life of the slacks is just another way to stop a complaint before it can get started. As a merchandiser, you certainly rely on the manufacturer to check a lot of these areas. Remember, though, you are the one who has to sell that merchandise and



tures of your merchandise will make you look like an expert when your customers come into the pro shop.

#### Start with slacks

Here are some hints: Always try to select the fully tailored look. Remember the vast majority of your members are mature men. They are looking for something fashionable, but comfortable and functional. The thigh should not be tight, and the seat should be full.

In the waist, the popular Ban-Rol feature has become a mainstay for golf slacks. This innovation stops any rolling in the waistband. French flies have also caught on in golf slacks. This is a button tab extension inside the slack, relieving tension from the zipper and hook closures. It keeps the material in the front of the slack flat and smooth.

good and hold up under many wearings. The stress points in the seat and knees and between the thighs will determine what kind of slack quality you have. Quality knit material shows density.

Along with what makes up the slack internally, external fit is essential. A well-engineered pattern insures proper fit. Get your patrons to try on any slacks they buy in your shop. Make sure the fit is right for them. Give people proper service, and you can be sure they will look your way when ready to buy again.

Other small things that add up to overall slack knowledge and an advantage in making the sale: Check every stress point in the slack to make sure it is reinforced. Each element in the slack must be compatible. For example, if puckering of seams results after washing, thread within the

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in the end is responsible to the customer.

#### Keep a good stock

With the basic intricacies of slacks out of the way, an analysis of inventory practices that will insure having the right sizes in stock is needed. To fit 90 percent of your members, the following slack sizes should be stocked:

SIZE—	32	34	36	38	40	42/	TOTAL
UNITS—	1	3	3	3	1	1/	12

You are asking for a lot of frustrated customers if you don't adopt a basic inventory such as the one above. Many pros have lost sales when a member or customer was ready to buy and his size was not in the shop. There is some flexibility to inventory planning. You can make file cards that list the significant sizes for each member, then tally them up and stock from your sample.

This plan is directly tied to stocking appropriate and coordinative shirts. Shirt orders should properly run in a ratio of 4 to 1 to maintain the proper size spread in them also.

#### Fundamentals of shirts

Since the advent of manmade fabrics, most of the shirts offered utilize a blend of those materials and cotton. A combination of 65 percent polyester and 35 percent cotton has become the one most widely accepted by manufacturers and consumers. This blend is durable, long wearing, easy to care for, and machine washable. Fabrics today are colorfast for a much longer period of time, and shirts keep a crisp look.

The cut of a shirt is also important. Today's golfer gets the fullest cut available, so complete body movement is assured and there is no binding around the neck, arms, and body. Comfort is an absolute necessity for the golfer when swinging his clubs.

Shirt length has to be right. The golfer should never have to worry about tucking in his shirt after a swing. Always check to see that shirts are hemmed at the bottom. Pocket stitching should also be checked, along with the buttons' sewing.

Sleeve length should be set so it will break at the golfer's elbow. It cannot interfere with the golfer's freedom of movement. Width should be



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enough that full arm muscle flexibility is possible. Large arm holes are essential to insure that the golfer will experience no binding or chafing while wearing the shirt.

#### Sweater season is here

A great many of the sweaters being produced today are of 100 percent Orlon acrylic, a synthetic fabric offering superior strength, colorfastness, and washability. Probably the most popular stitch in sweaters these days is the link stitch, which provides excellent texture and warmth with amazing lightness.

Cardigan sweaters are the popular movers in the shop, as always, and their constant quality construction has assured the pro of continued success in sales.

Pockets in a cardigan have to be “set-in” the garment; they cannot be patch pockets. This part of the gar-

ment must lay flat and out of sight when not in use. No sagging will be seen on a well-made cardigan.

One-piece construction is one of the most attractive features of the good cardigan. It has no side seams. This escalates the cost factor to your customers or members, but in the long run, the sweater will continue to keep its fit.

Many sweaters offer elasticized cuffs and bottoms, providing a snug fit for excellent appearance on the course. These cuffs often are longer than normal length, to give a fit to all arm lengths. This is another sales advantage to you from an inventory standpoint.

#### Selling golf shoes

Quality costs. It's as simple as that. Convincing your members to buy the best, and to be prepared to pay top dollar for it, is a matter of product knowledge for you.

There are several things you can check to be sure the shoes you are receiving from the manufacturer are up to par: Is the inside of the shoe fully lined for comfort? Are the shoes smoothly made? Here, make sure there are no puckers, wrinkles, or pockets. Do the shoes match in color? Is there a one-piece toe-to-heel cushion innersole to absorb shock and keep out heat and cold? This innersole is found in most expensive shoes and is made of fine glove leather, which resists perspiration. Another good feature to look for is a foam pad placed under the tongue lining to keep laces from pressing the foot.

Explaining the higher cost of quality shoes to your members comes from simply knowing more about the product you have. Three features that push up the cost of shoes are intricate designs on the leather; special tanning of soles and uppers with solutions to keep them from becoming cracked and brittle with rough weather; and colored uppers, especially popular in the variety of two-tone shoes on the market now.

Quality in spike selection is another factor in selecting the right shoes for your golfers. Check for chrome-plated spikes screwed into female receptacles, which are locked onto the steel plate to allow simple, quick replacement.



### Take advantage of salesmen

Perhaps the biggest assist the golf professional can get in selecting quality merchandise that his customers will buy is to utilize manufacturers' representatives and salesmen to keep abreast of changes in the marketplace.

According to Spalding sportswear product manager Mike Seymour, salesmen can start off looking at the pro's market by starting a simple analysis of potential sales. "I can't tell you how many pros I've spoken to who don't know current dollar inventory levels or the real extent of future orders," Seymour told GOLF BUSINESS. "Also, the pro seems to have a bad inclination to impuse shop, only to wake up later to the nightmare of a lot of markdowns and other headaches."

Spalding is attempting to train their men in interior shop design and permanent display considerations, so in the future they can become "buying consultants" instead of order takers. Many companies in the trade already are involved in such programs to aid the professional. Such knowledge is extremely important for the pro, since many shops have limited space and are not set up for multiple impulse sales.

### Display your way to profits

The smart professional attempts to make the biggest sale possible by showing the customer that the slacks he buys have a matching shirt or shirts that can complete his golf wardrobe. One big way to get this point across is in displays. Utilize displays that show matching slacks, sweaters, shirts, and shoes together to give the complete look.

Display is a statement of class for the pro. He emphasizes his merchandise with it and can influence the customer to look at the lines he is attempting to move. High quality is the key, but wise display practices, including proper lighting, can help it along.

It might cost a little more money, but think about the way you indicate your selling atmosphere to the customer or member. Do you continue to use handwritten signs to convey your sales messages? Do you clutter your shop with manufacturers' displays? Sometimes, these signs only get in the

way of what the customer is really in your shop for: the merchandise. Salesmanship is the key to the sale — merchandising accessories will often aid a sale, but they can't make it for you.

Neatness counts in the shop. A well-organized shop will earn you more respect among your golfers. Shoe horns and shoe measuring devices should not be left lying around the shoe area. Hang these items on hooks to keep them where you won't misplace them.

Take every advantage you can in making the softgoods sale. What about the actual color of the shop you are in? Do the walls, floors, and color of the display units all conform or harmonize with the other club or course facilities? Remember the pro shop is part of the entire club operation, and members do notice the subtle differences when they enter.

Creative displays that get the member's eye are what you are looking for. Sometimes they can be simple elements that are around you at the club. Tables and chairs from the clubhouse could be brought into the shop with clothed mannequins correctly attired in your newest merchandise. Even benches or lockers from the locker room could be brought in to add more reality to your displays, focusing your customers' attention on items that are immediately recognizable.

Impact is the important factor in display. Displays must remain temporary, current, and shortlived. A good rule of thumb on displays is to keep them up no longer than a week. Don't become the only one in the shop with a creative streak — utilize your assistants in display. It will be good training for them in the long run.

Think about being a display in your own right. Wear things in the shop that you sell. Have your staff do the same, even the man in charge of the golf cars. In a sense, you and your staff act as additional mannequins. It is just another extension of the buying atmosphere you must establish.

Variety in your inventory is still the best way to insure sales to your members. Keeping the shelves full is an important factor. After the stocking is over, continue to promote the merchandise you have. Direct mail pieces to your membership or regular customers are always useful ways to

communicate your message. Most companies offer envelope stuffers that can give your mailing added impact with the use of manufacturers' brochures.

Where will softgoods go in the future? Obviously, the apparel market does not have the problem of the hardgoods industry with its competition coming more and more from specialty shops, sporting goods dealers, and department stores that all want a shot at selling pro-line equipment.

Although many companies such as Izod and Munsingwear already sell to department stores, there are lines available either due to pricing or type of garment that are not very saleable in normal retail outlets. Many pros at the better clubs are going to different companies in the sweater industry to get merchandise that is almost exclusively for the pro shop trade.

Selling softgoods appears to be the future of the pro shop market. With a little work, it will pay off for you. □