

Replacement parts: Part I

A Roundtable discussion

One of the great things about the business of golf is that the people, both industry and superintendent, are willing to get together and talk; to air their mutual problems and try to come up with a solution. Such was the case when **GOLF BUSINESS** asked 18 industry representatives and superintendents to sit in on a roundtable discussion of replacement parts. The only guidelines were that the discussion be open and constructive.

GOLF BUSINESS taped the discussion which resulted in some 100 pages of manuscript. In order to give complete coverage to what transpired, we are going to run a series developed from the manuscript. This first installment will cover how some of the companies route their parts requests.



Jack Krug, Jacobsen Division of Textron, out of Racine, Wisconsin, describes how the system at Jacobsen works: "I'll tell you how we do it, don't do it.

Assuming that the user, the customer does not have the part on their shelf, and that's another topic for discussion, the first step is the servicing distributor. If that distributor has the part, the problem will be solved quickly. If, on the other hand, that distributor does not have the part, the next natural step is for the distributor to go to the manufacturer to get the part. Assuming that that machine is down and is costing the consumer money, time is the most important factor in moving that part to the user. The distributor would, in Jacobsen's case, contact the factory, using the "unit-down" system that we currently employ. The "unit-down" system is a system within a system which dictates that the part has to be pulled in 48 hours, or less, from receipt of order. That order is phoned in on a toll-free line and goes directly into a small department whose sole existence in life is to try and come up with that part.

"We do four different things to try to get that part. If it's on the shelf, no

problem, it goes out the same day. If, on the other hand, it's not on the shelf, then the next step is to go to the manufacturing level to see if the part is available there. Unit-down has priority over everything, including production. If there is only one of that part, the user gets it.

"Let's assume it isn't there. The third step is to get on the horn to our distribution around the country to locate that part someplace and then make a transaction from point A to point B to get that part flown in. The fourth option, and the one we don't like to do but will, is if there is a machine in the crate and that part is on it, it comes off.

"OK. If that fails we have no options but to back order the parts, inform everybody of the bad news, and then try to set a creditable promise date. That's when we begin to catch the flack from the user. He doesn't care about our promise and I can't blame him. That, however, is basically our procedure."



Roy Eldred, The Toro Company: "When you buy, or invest, in a product, what do you expect? What are your expectations as owner of that piece of equipment? I think it

is how well your expectations are satisfied that allow you to form a perception of whether or not we as a manufacturer are satisfying those needs. That perception really becomes your actual experience.

"I'd like to tell you just what, from our standpoint, our mission as an original equipment supplier, designing, manufacturing and selling products for your use, is from my vantage point. I'm responsible for the parts operation of Toro. Our mission is to enhance the sale of Toro products by providing a very high level of after-marketing parts service. That says that my number one concern is customer satisfaction. You might say that could very well be a sales objective related to parts. In other words, you have got a

certain goal that you've got to meet for the year. I approach it in this way: If I make customer satisfaction goal number one, I'm also going to achieve my sales goals in the process. We're dealing in a repeat market, replacement market, and if we don't take care of the customer today, he's going to go to somebody else tomorrow.

"Now, we obviously can't do all of this from our one location in Minneapolis. We depend upon a distributor organization. I think it is very important that we have local representatives that customers can call upon with some convenience. You must have a commitment locally to see that your needs are taken care of and that your investment is protected.

"There are literally thousands of parts in a system and there is no way one distributor could ever stock every part for every product. We wouldn't want him to have every part for every product on his shelves. It is very key that everybody in our whole organization make money at whatever they're doing because if they can't, they're not going to be there to satisfy your needs and see that the investment is taken care of.

"Out of the thousands of parts that are in the system, it is easy to understand why maybe a weldment or a frame would be on back order, but why would we have cutter bars and bed knives on back order? Those are difficult questions to answer and usually it is not related to our ability to forecast need. Usually it is something through the distribution system that causes that to happen. But I can assure you that as a manufacturer, we are working very hard to see that our supply organization is in place, that it is functioning, and that the people are trained and that they understand the business. We don't expect them to carry everything for our products. For those that we don't expect them to carry we have a procedure at Toro to allow them to get whatever they need within a time frame that will satisfy the owner of our products.

"I think we've got some systems in place, we've worked with our distributors in identifying parts that should be stocked at distributor level, we recommend parts for every product that we produce and sell, we

have emergency priority methods for our distributors to get the equipment they need within the shortest period of time possible, directly from us and we try to do the best job we can communicating whenever those needs cannot be filled promptly within a time frame the customer might expect."



Tom Mascaro, Turfiber: "I think it would be wise at this point to identify the problem and start from there and work backwards.

Identifying the problem in

parts, I've been in this field many years as most of you know. It is the Superintendent himself, whose job is on the line when he can't get a part. I've seen a few Superintendents fired over the years because they couldn't get a brand new machine working and the chairman or somebody got mad at them and said you shouldn't have bought it, probably didn't want him to buy it in the first place. Nevertheless, the problem is right there, the Superintendent's job is on the line. I've heard Superintendents saying that they would not deal with a company any longer because they just didn't supply the parts. That's how they feel about it. Now it's your problem with the Superintendent, as I see it, as long as his job is on the line. The other thing is that down time is pretty expensive.

"Now these are the basic problems. The biggest problem is how to solve them. I've been advocating a system over the years and that is that the engineer who designed the machine can predict what is going to go bad. He knows where the Archille's heel is, where the parts are going to break, but he doesn't transfer this information as he should or it gets lost in the shuffle. The other problem is the salesman himself, who isn't familiar with the machine, he has never been told of the weak points, he's only been told of the strong points. So he sells a machine without really knowing that it is going to break sooner or later and there are parts that wear out faster than other parts.

"When the Superintendent buys a machine, he ought to buy a bucketful

of parts, right then and there. That's his assurance that the machine will keep running. At one time, I advocated that manufacturers tried shelving with their own parts numbers so that the Superintendent could stock up. I have never seen budgets that have listed parts inventory. It is treated as a secondary thing and the importance isn't placed on the thing that really creates more problems than anything else."



Reed LeFebvre, Superintendent, Plant City CC, Florida: "Part of the problem is that golf course suppliers perse or equipment is generally only about 20-25

percent of the manufacturers' total goods so to speak. If we are 20 percent of your business, we get, theoretically, 20 percent of your attention to our needs. You know there is a big market for snowmobiles, there is a big market for other commercial things and they come higher in priority than we do. This may be one of the reasons why we have, I would say it is insensitivity. Sometimes we get the feeling that it is that when we go to get a part. It is kind of a frustrating thing when you go to get a part, you've got a piece of equipment down and you're in the middle of a job, and let's say they don't have the part. They say we don't have the part, we'll have to back order it. Now, most of the time you throw your hand up and say well it's going to be three weeks before you get it, so there goes any schedule you had. You might just as well hang it up. I think that comes under insensitivity as far as the parts people down on the local level. It would be ideal if there were ten Superintendents working in the parts department. You could go in and say I need this part and it looks like this and they could spot it right away. That's no excuse for not having a parts number, but what they don't realize is that when you're down, you're down! It's costing you money just like a gas station that doesn't have any gas to pump.

"one of the other big areas where I find there seems to be a problem is with a distributor who handles other manufacturers' equipment. This seems to be where you run into a

problem of being able to get replacement parts within a reasonable amount of time. Now, reasonable depends on what part you're ordering. Some parts may break down once every ten years, and reasonable has to be a little ways down the road. But for a common usage part, I don't think that there should be any longer length of time for you to be able to get it than it should be straight from the manufacturer. In other words, there is some sort of communication lag between manufacturers.

"If I need a part, I want you to be sure or to guarantee me that you're going to supply me with the parts I need. This is what I look for in whatever I go to get. I buy service."



Wayne Sloan, Gulf Stream Land & Development:

"I think the problem that we have is maybe two or three or four fold so the solution is going to vary with

the problems. I think first of all that the consumer has to do a better job of planning. The manufacturer needs to help out in this area as far as planning the lists of replacement parts that are most likely to wear out. There has to be a real marketing effort in this area.

"I'm sure this would be a benefit to the manufacturer and the distributor two, three and four fold, because that's just that many less dollars you're going to have to have tied up in inventory. This also gives additional parts out in the field which can be swapped between "good old buddies".

"Getting back to urgencies, everything is not urgent, but everything is treated as urgent. If we can cut down on the number of urgencies in the system, then reaction to true emergencies will be better. I think we can eliminate a lot of urgencies by going about things in a different fashion than we have in the past.

"The other thing that strikes me in looking at the cost of labor, both distributors and manufacturers', is that packaging of high usage items with a little better price than if they were sold one by one. We can cut the cost on these things and maybe make it a little more appealing for people to buy. You're saving some dollars in inven-

tory stock costs."



Bruce Oliver, Zaun Equipment Company: "I need a replacement part. Communication and identification is extremely important. When a customer is

communicating, he should know to the best of his ability what he really and truly needs. He may have an incorrect number, he may have no number and try to work on identification. That is tough.

"I think the things that we've tried to do in the last few years is to better communicate in service schools and in the delivery of a piece of equipment. A customer has to sign that he has received the parts book and instructions. We're trying to protect ourselves as far as product liability, so there are

certain things that he has to have to begin with.

"Usually it is not the Superintendent, but someone who works for him, who begins the communication to our order entry department. The thing that is most important is to identify the problem. Somebody calls and they'll say: 'Do you have something?' Now, they don't say I've got a machine down, they don't really say they're going to buy the part, just do you have it. If we look up on the board and say 'No, we don't', well, they slam the phone down and really don't identify what the problem is: Is the machine down, do they want us to get it for them? Then lo and behold, about three weeks later, somebody will recommunicate with us and say where is my part? They didn't order it to begin with.

"So communication/identification is right at the grass roots of this thing. The distributor is really the middle guy. We sell the product and live on the service. And if we don't have it, we have no purpose for existence. Manufacturers made it, customers

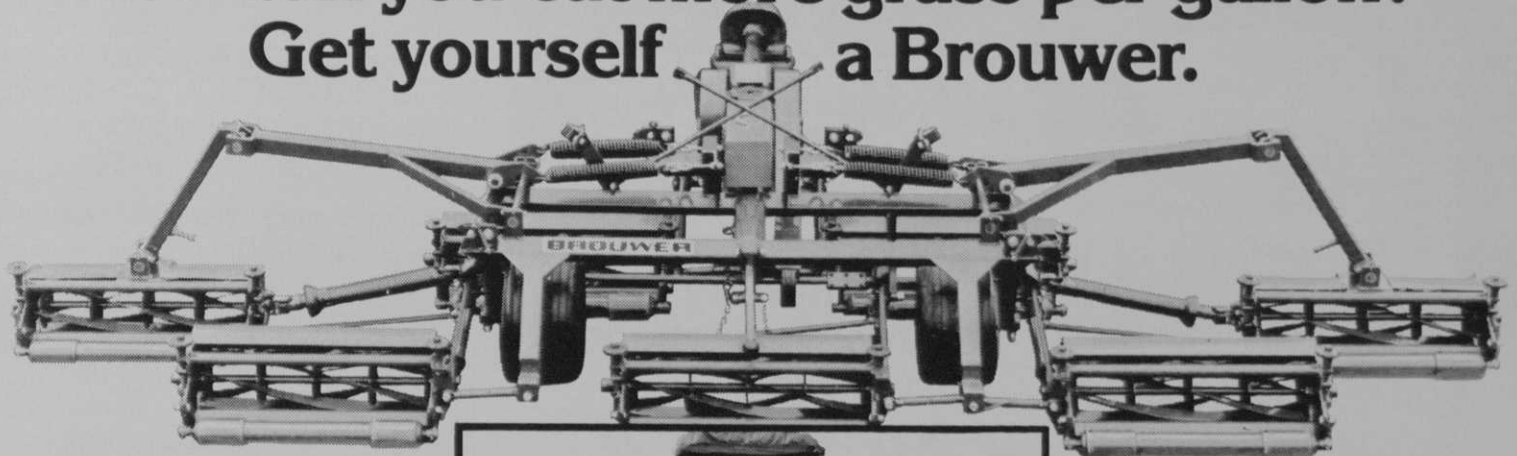
purchased it. We've got to provide service."



John McKenzie, Superintendent, Walt Disney World, Windermere, Florida: "Are we talking about the part that we really need, or the one that we're planning on

needing? On the manufacturers level, I'd like to see something that suggests listed parts and the time to replace them. Just breaking it down, take bearings for instance: If you're going to get three years use out of a bearing, tell the guy who is buying it. The engineers have to know, let's face it, the economy is based on planned obsolescence. They're going to know that hydraulic lines are good for two years. Tell the guy: In two years you need to

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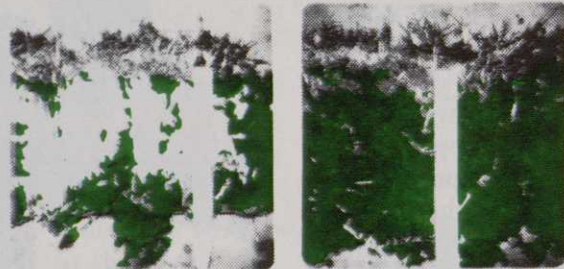
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"When a guy's got 18 holes on a limited budget and he's down, he's down. I get phone calls during the year saying help me out, I need a hand greens mower or something like that, I'm down. Here, I think it's the distributor's responsibility to go ahead and have some backup equipment for that man. Or if the guy has a greens mower down, the distributor should wheel the demo down there and let him have it until he can provide the service that is necessary.

"I'm saying, sure it's good to go ahead and plan your parts. In our business you do all the planning you want, but it's still a surprise breakdown that hits you. When I'm down, I call people all across the state. I'll call friends of mine that are Superintendents and say I don't care if we have to spend three hours to go somewhere. It's better than four weeks. I think on the distributor level, they can communicate among themselves also. Car dealers do it all the time. Not everybody can go to a computerized system or a teletype, but a phone call is simple."

(Editor's note: This first installment gives some insight into how manufacturers and distributors approach the parts replacement problem. It is clear that if a true emergency exists, it must be communicated down the line. It must start with the Superintendent stating that the emergency exists. We also find out that the manufacturer will do all he can to insure the part reaches the Superintendent in the shortest time possible. In spite of this the problem still exists. This first installment has by no means solved the problem, but does raise some interesting thoughts. I hope that you will take time to respond in writing to us with your thoughts. Keep in mind that the only reason there were only 18 people at this roundtable is that we couldn't get all of you together at one time. We hope to do that through these articles. Write us with your thoughts, we hope to answer them with the next installment. If we don't, then we will print the letters to keep the discussion going and see what answers our readers come up with.)