

## Strategic Planning

By Brian Whitlark, agronomist, West Region

**February 22, 2011**

Your club may be one of the most successful in the region, so why should you consider a strategic plan? Although you may take great satisfaction in your success to date, you should consider a strategic plan to invest in ideas that will keep the club responsive to market conditions and competition. A well-developed strategic plan will justify your decisions going forward and position the club for whatever the future has in store. A strategic plan will help the club to stay among the leaders in the private club community in your region. When formulating a strategic plan, you should consider the following twelve national trends that will likely have the greatest impact on clubs over the next five to ten years. These trends were identified by Mike Leemhuis, CEO/GM of Congressional Country Club ([gm@ccclub.org](mailto:gm@ccclub.org)) and consultant Fred Laughlin ([flaughlinaz@mac.com](mailto:flaughlinaz@mac.com)) in an article titled *Gauging the impact of national trends on private clubs*, published in Club Management, November/December, 2010.

1. Change in diets and food preferences: There is an increasing national interest in healthier, more nutritional diets and menus, buying locally grown food, low carb, gluten free, etc.
2. Increased interest in fitness: Many clubs are promoting a healthier lifestyle for their members, looking at a wide range of fitness techniques and activities.
3. Intergenerational issues: Baby boomers now average 64 years old, and the gap between younger and older members continues to grow. Clubs are challenged to serve multiple generations that have uniquely different perspectives and lifestyles.

4. Flat growth in golf: The past few years have seen flat growth or even a recession in growth in the golf industry.
5. Emphasis on being *green* or environmentally friendly: Global warming, water quality, and conservation of protected wetlands and habitats, use of pesticides and herbicides and related *green* issues continue to motivate clubs to be more sustainable with their water and energy and to be mindful of their overall environmental impact.
6. Tailoring membership and fees structures: Clubs are adjusting the model of their membership to reach a wider market and increase revenue.
7. Impact of technology: Cell phones, texting, PDAs, and other social media are causing clubs to change their rules regarding the use of such devices in the club area. Furthermore, members are more comfortable with the use of Internet for paperless billing and other communication.
8. Demand for casual environment: Businesses of all types have modified their standards of dress to meet the growing demand for a more relaxed, casual environment. The trend also extends to dining, with the emergence of sports bars, bistros, and the like.
9. Improving management and governments: Larger and more complex clubs call for more efficient and effective facilities management and resources, and more responsive, transparent governance models and techniques.
10. Popularity of non-golf activities: Tennis, volleyball, swimming, and basketball, including a number of other sports and games, are attracting participants who want an alternative to golf.
11. Emphasis on family programming: Attracting a younger demographic often requires an increase in the services to all ages and family types, including childcare, special areas and activities for youth, children's clinics, special programs for women, sports camps and classes, etc.
12. Non-traditional services and amenities: Spa services, manicures and pedicures, massages, hair salons, saunas and steam rooms, women-only workout centers, business centers, lifestyle directors, and concierge services are some of the non-traditional services that entice members.

If you have not already done so, make strategic planning a priority in 2011.

Source: Brian Whitlark ([bwhitlark@usga.org](mailto:bwhitlark@usga.org)).

**West Region Agronomists:**

Patrick J. Gross, regional director – [pgross@usga.org](mailto:pgross@usga.org)

Larry W. Gilhuly, agronomist – [lgilhuly@usga.org](mailto:lgilhuly@usga.org)

Brian S. Whitlark, agronomist – [bwhitlark@usga.org](mailto:bwhitlark@usga.org)

Blake Meentemeyer, agronomist – [bmeentemeyer@usga.org](mailto:bmeentemeyer@usga.org)

[Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service](#)

[Contact the Green Section Staff](#)