

# A Penny Saved...

It's still early in the new year, but if you are a greenkeeper or Golf Course Manager, it's likely your workload already seems to match the busiest time of the past year - and you are not alone. Being extremely busy even in what could be considered the 'off-season' is a trend that has been developing in most golfing countries around the world over the past 12 years.

*Continue  
to learn*



Greenkeepers and Course Managers are being asked to do more and more with fewer resources, and are expected to maintain top-quality golf courses that meet the consistently high and rising, I daresay expectations of paying golfers and private club members.

This is a significant challenge that can be examined by starting with the question: "How can you maintain your golf course and operation at a high standard, while required to work within budgets that are flat or declining each year?"

Unlike your resources, golfers' expectations have not diminished. They still want and demand a great 'experience' or 'value' for their money. What has diminished is the amount of revenue golf courses are able to generate. The reason for this revenue decline varies from one country to another, but among the factors affecting golf course revenue can be the economy, societal or political issues, or demographic shifts of a nation's golfers.

Whatever the reason, the result is that you are left facing the challenge put forth above. Lower revenues translate directly to lower operations budgets, which can directly impact how well you do your job and, in the end, the appearance and playability of the golf course.

So our focus here will be on **'How to do more with less.'** This will involve a close look at where irrigation budgets are spent and will include identifying opportunities for improvements or savings.

## **GOLF BUDGETS: A DOWNWARD TREND**

The National Golf Foundation (NGF) has published data supporting the conclusion that there has been a general trend of declining budgets over the past 10 years. Most greenkeepers I've spoken with have had to come up with creative ways to deal with this. Additionally, the worldwide golf construction industry has seen a shift from new golf course construction to increased renovation construction on existing courses. Today, approximately

two-thirds of all golf course construction is remodeling or renovating.

This naturally makes us ask Why? Why less new construction today and, instead, increased investment in renovation of existing irrigation systems? In short, the answer is supply - the number of courses and demand - the number of rounds being played.

While the number of rounds of golf played has stayed relatively constant over the past 25 years, the number of golf courses has increased greatly in that time. This has resulted in a reduced need for new courses, and it has brought about greater competition between the existing golf courses for golfers' business. In many cases, this competition has led to price battles, which makes it harder to show operating profits and leads to tightened budgets. Working within tighter budgets, greenkeepers face greater challenges in maintaining great looking, great playing golf courses.

## **EFFICIENCY: A BUDGET STRETCHING TOOL**

It can be extremely difficult to generate additional revenue, especially in such a competitive marketplace where golfers can 'price shop' for the best perceived golf value.

So instead of seeking greater revenue, I suggest you initially focus on maximising the return on your expenditures. I recommend that you find ways to 'stretch' your budget to its fullest, and the primary way to achieve this is through efficiency.

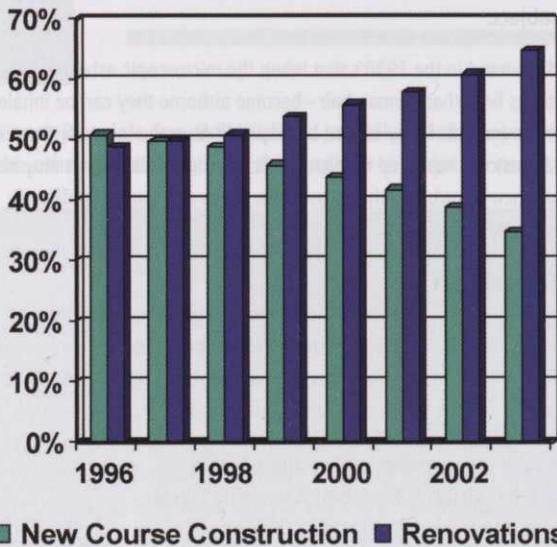
Efficiency is the main benefit produced by the renovation of a golf course's irrigation system. Increased operating efficiency reduces operating costs and lowers the consumption of resources such as water and electricity.

Improvements in golf irrigation efficiency can be measured and are reflected favorably in a greenkeeper's budget. This measurability is a significant reason why more and more courses are considering, or pursuing, irrigation renovation.





**Kenne James looks at how making the most of your resources can have a significant impact on the bottom line**



Consider: A renovation of a golf course's irrigation system may result in the single largest savings and also be the most productive change that can be made to a golf course.

Hard to believe? Well, most of us either don't have the time to evaluate our course's irrigation system thoroughly, or we think our systems are fine and operating effectively. What we may not realise is that if an irrigation system has not received good annual maintenance, or is 10 years old or older, it is most likely not to be as efficient as new technology and practices allow.

Yet many would ask: "So what? How much difference can there be between my aging system and a renovated, more efficient irrigation system?"

Take your pick of answers, choosing from among 'significant', 'dramatic' and 'quite possibly amazing!' Take a look.

**MEASURABLE SAVINGS**

When you consider that nozzle efficiencies have improved 10% or more in the last 10 years, and computerising a non-computerised system may result in another 15 to 25% savings due to improved efficiency, the difference made by renovation can be substantial. In fact, for many golf courses, it may be the difference between profit and loss.

Let's look at an example of what just a 15% gain in efficiency can provide. Here are eight possible benefits that could result from optimising sprinkler system efficiencies.

Start with water consumption. A 15% more efficient coverage pattern due to upgrades in sprinklers, nozzles, spacing, etc., can result in a 15% reduction in the (1) COST of water. Using 15% less water will result in saving approximately 15% of the (2) COST of the electricity required to pump the water.

Next, consider the maintenance expense of the entire irrigation system. One could argue that if you

use the system 15% less, the maintenance expenses, including pipe breaks, nozzle clogging, valve rebuilding, pumps, etc, will be about (3) 15% lower. A benefit to the golfer is that 15% less maintenance could result in (4) greatly reduced 'Ground Under Repair' issues. A further benefit to the greenkeeper is that his (5) labour cost will be lowered and his time will be freed up, allowing him to work on the many other projects that await him. The golf course itself benefits in many ways, the first of which is that the same irrigation system being used 15% less will probably last 15% longer. (6) This translates to getting more for the same investment.

The last two benefits are probably the most important. Higher efficiency watering patterns mean that you are not over-watering or under-watering as much - which is critical to promote the (7) optimum health of the turfgrass. Isn't this what our work is really all about? Isn't it our goal to produce and maintain the best looking, most playable golf turf? Efficiency helps us to achieve this goal, and it's efficiency that allows us to achieve it, while reducing our operating costs.

Finally, healthy turfgrass, the elimination of wet and dry spots and less 'Ground Under Repair' all contribute to a better looking, and most likely, a better-playing golf course. The golfer who enjoys a better experience on your course will be more likely to play more rounds at your course. This golfer is also more likely to compare your course to other local or regional venues and to tell his golfing friends about the high-value experience your course provides. (8) This may result in your course's ability to charge higher fees and get more rounds, producing more favorable financial results.

By assessing your golf course's irrigation system, you focus on - and, I hope, improve - its efficiency. You can see by the benefits listed why the topic of efficiency is not just very important, it can be the critical difference between success and failure. Efficiency is all-important when it comes to a proper irrigation system. It can also be a measure of the greenkeeper's success. It's hard to do anything but compliment a better looking golf course that is maintained on a lower budget.

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