

# Ensuring your Contractor Does Not Become a Handicap

There's far more to selecting a golf course irrigation system than meets the eye. Is it any wonder that many clubs opt to engage a consultant from the design stage through to fruition? Jon Jinks explains why it is possible to have the best of both worlds - the right system, at the right price and save potentially many thousands of pounds on consultants fees.



Let me say at the outset that many golf course officers opt to engage a consultant for peace of mind and I for one can fully understand their rationale, having the highest regard for their expertise and professionalism.

At the end of the day, when the job is done and dusted the manager/committee members will - if the project goes "pear-shaped" - be able to say that he or she consulted an expert. "What more could I have done to ensure that the system

would be installed smoothly and efficiently," I can almost hear them say.

Well, it is worth putting the pros and cons into perspective. A significant project costed by a contractor of around £150k, would represent a hefty investment by any club's standards. However, with a consultant on board, the costs don't end there - in addition there is his or her fee - adding a further 10% or so to the total bill.

Peace of mind clearly comes at a price, but I would be the first to acknowledge that it is better to employ a good consultant and incur extra costs, than be left flying 'solo' with a contractor who is not up to scratch.

To avoid this pitfall, select a contractor with a real pedigree. Find out some of the projects they have worked on and check out with the respective golf course managers just how they performed. This will give an insight into the commitment and professionalism of the company and whether disruption to the course was kept to an acceptable level. If any snags arose during the project, ascertain how well these were dealt with at the time and, very importantly, whether the costs escalated, or the contractor kept within, or close to budget.

There are a number of key questions that golf course managers should ask of potential contractors looking to quote on the design, supply and installation of an irrigation management system.

First and foremost while seeking design services or professional advice always look to deal with a company that is covered by PI insurance. This is very important and a good guide to the suitability of the company. In order to qualify for PI insurance, a contractor will need to satisfy some very stringent standards and conditions laid down by the insurance company - as a result very few companies are able to get cover.

Secondly, all work should be guaranteed to at least meet the minimum standards as laid down by the British Turf and Landscape Irrigation Association (BTLIA). Website: [www.btlia.org.uk](http://www.btlia.org.uk)

Thirdly, ensure that when a contractor installs a system he is fully aware of all contractual obligations, including health and safety aspects. Also clarify - at the outset - that they will provide full ongoing maintenance support for the system. (Clearly, it is safer to go with a company that has been successfully trading for a number of years).

Unless a customer selects a knowledgeable company - with inherent integrity - he or she will need to ask the right questions in order to obtain a system capable of meeting their requirements. It is vital to make a contractor aware of the club's medium to long-term needs so that the system can be adapted, or expanded accordingly.

The majority of the full system installations undertaken in Northern Europe, will be to irrigate greens, tees and possibly approaches, while it's only the bigger clubs that can stretch to a full fairway system which can cost as much as £750k.

Fourthly, don't opt for a quote just because it is the cheapest - compare like for like specifications. Conversely, a company may over 'spec' a job in order to cover itself. The system will do the job (and do it well), but a contractor that really understands their clubs needs and is technically adept, may recommend a less expensive system, knowing that it is more than equipped to cope with the needs of the course both now and in the future.

What we do as irrigation specialists is a science. On the face of it, applying water to a crop should be child's play. However, if not applied correctly, grass will not grow properly. Water needs to be distributed evenly and at the correct pressure to ensure that it permeates the ground optimally and reaches the root in the desired quantities.

There are some excellent companies in our industry. Unfortunately there are a substantial number that don't fully appreciate the required science. Yes, they can install pipes, correctly and at the desired depths, but this is an engineering job and everyone in our sector should be able to do that. If they can't, a good analogy would be rather like a house builder unable to lay bricks.

Therefore, my advice to any golf course manager or club official is to do your homework before selecting a contractor, including checking out the satisfaction levels of a number of their customers. By doing this, you will be helping to safeguard your investment and be in a position to select a company that will be capable of meeting your needs.

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