

Lateral thinking key to saving money



James de Havilland looks at ways in which you can ensure your facility is being cost effective and environmentally responsible at the same time

As many golf clubs around the World are now finding, the global recession and its impact upon revenues and profitability has not followed a fixed trend.

One point that is clear, however, is that those clubs that have made the most of what they have to offer have seen a less dramatic impact upon their 'bottom line'. But there are other things you can do to help trim your costs.

Don't worry. This is not going to be a patronising list of 'ideas' to help bring in revenue. There are enough marketing experts who can tell a club how to try and drum up extra business when money is tight. That said most clubs are doing a pretty good job by themselves. You only have to telephone a few courses to see that there are some interesting incentives on offer that have helped keep green fees coming in and club revenues ticking over.

In fact the best 'scheme' remains the same as it does in the good times; ensure both members and visitors are kept happy by offering a good overall package. A decent round of golf and a friendly club atmosphere offer the lasting value that keeps people coming back. Great golf, fair pricing, decent catering and friendly staff will never go out of fashion and are the keys to success in tough times.

So if your marketing and 'customer care' is in good shape but you

still need more, what else can you do? The key can sometimes be to think laterally.

Energy saving is a good example. Just stop and think how much it costs to keep various chillers running in a club bar. If the answer to that is you have no idea on this sort of detail cost, you would not be alone. If you also think this level of detail understanding is not relevant you may also be missing the point.

So make the same question more global. By how much have your electricity costs increased over the past five years? You should have an answer. The next question is obvious. Have you done anything to try and reduce these energy costs?

In fact you can give yourself a nasty shock by looking at all utility bills. Water and sewerage costs have all increased. Oil and gas costs have fluctuated, a fall in price from the peaks we have experienced over the Winter of 2008 proving so welcome that it is easy to overlook the overall trend; all forms of energy are getting more expensive. Even business rates have rocketed in some parts of the UK. All this is before you take in the costs of looking after the course and general club infrastructure.

So what can you do? With regard to electricity, modern control systems should mean it is easier to manage certain details such as lighting. It is pretty obvious that there is no point in having a light on if there is

no one around to benefit from it. It is also a waste to artificially light areas bathed in natural light. And why allow a chiller to run when there are no bottles to be chilled within it?

Although the savings that can be made by careful electricity management may seem small, it is surprising how they can help trim your bills. It is well worth contacting your electricity supplier and having them carry out an energy audit to see if they can help.

Water consumption is another hot topic. A big roof is a huge resource when it comes to collecting rainwater, so this is well worth looking into. Company's like Evesham-based Even Products (www.evenproducts.com) can supply self-build water tanks that will hold around 100,000 litres of water for under £3,000. A simple rain water harvest system can be set-up for around £5,000, a sum that will look pretty reasonable against most mains water bills.

A roof can also be used to trap the sun. Although photovoltaic tiles allow roofs to be converted into mini generators, the installation costs are still extremely high. So although these systems may be great for your environmental PR, covering a roof with these electricity generating units should not be considered for their value in saving money. The story can be different on a new build, however, particularly if you can get a

Solar hot water heating systems have been in use in the UK for many years. Designed to help reduce reliance of fossil fuels, many systems are installed simply because they can help reduce CO2 emissions. The ability of these solar collectors to save money has been questioned, critics suggesting it can take a 25 years or more to 'earn back' the installation cost. The recent hikes in energy costs have, however, helped change many a sceptics mind, solar hot water heating now having a much reduced pay-back period.



grant or some other incentive.

The sun can also be harnessed to heat water. This is arguably the most viable 'solar' system to consider as it is 'relatively' inexpensive to retrofit a collection array and solar hot water system into an existing building. The key is to ensure the hot water generated is used to supplement an existing system. You cannot rely on a solar system to generate hot water year round or on overcast summer days. But when in action, modern collectors can generate impressive amounts of hot water, even in winter. The downside is commercial systems can be costly, even allowing for capital allowances.

Grants may be available to cover certain 'green' initiatives, but these are currently thin on the ground. The best way to establish what may be on offer is to contact bodies to include the Solar Trades Association (www.solar-trade.org.uk) and the Energy Savings Trust (www.energysavingtrust.org.uk).

On more general matters, the Golf Environment Organisation has an excellent paper on this issue. Entitled 'Practical ways to improve energy efficiency in golf facilities' it outlines ways to save energy that do not necessarily involve doing anything more than managing your resources more efficiently:

www.golfenvironment.org/pub/doc/tree/10/EnergyEfficiencyinGolfFacilities.pdf



ABOVE: A top golf club will focus upon all the small details that make playing a round pleasurable from start to finish. Helpful staff, good signage, affordable refreshments and good presentation can all help keep existing custom and attract visitors. Behind the scenes, keeping an eye on costs is a key to remaining buoyant in choppy economic water.

LEFT: Recycling and composting waste generated during course maintenance is by no means a new idea, but few clubs have the room to deal with large piles of unsightly debris. The answer is to shred everything to reduce its volume, but a shredder is not a cheap tool. So why not hire one in? Tight budgets need not interrupt good course management.



LEFT: Harvesting rain water need not cost a fortune. As a guide, a system that can store around 100,000 litres of water collected from roofs may cost a little as £5000. Used as a non-potable water source for vehicle wash bays and irrigation, harvested water is a great way to save money. What is more, you do not need a huge roof area; from a roof space of 50 x 10 metres you can expect to collect up to 600,000 litres of water a year.