

MIDWEST BREEZES

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2012 CDGA Public Golf Summit

Being a “public golf guy”, I decided to attend the 2012 CDGA Public Golf Summit to see what was up. Public golf has long been a large part of the golf industry, the majority of the courses within the Chicago District Golf Association are public. Our area is well known throughout the country for having many high quality public golf courses.

Representatives of golf facilities both privately and publically owned gathered together at the Midwest Golf House on October 25, 2012 to discuss common issues centered the business of golf. The format was a round table discussion featuring open dialogs moderated by CDGA representatives. Note cards were passed around to solicit topics for conversation. Most of the attendees were Golf Professionals, Club Managers, Owners and a couple of Golf Course Superintendents.

A summary of the topics discussed:

Reservations and the issue of “no shows”

- How do courses fill empty tee slots? Most operators were against the concept of discounting.
- How do courses enforce the “short show” issue of people booking times for 4 and showing up with 2? Difficult to enforce without losing customer service and the overall experience.
- On line reservations were discussed. Right now only a minority of times are internet booked. People are still calling on the telephone and speaking to a person to make their reservation. Many people have questions that only a person can answer.

Pace of Play

- The general consensus target time was four hours. This can be hard to enforce on more difficult courses and with lesser skilled players. “I paid my money and

I’m taking my time” is hard to argue with when the customer is always right.

- Do GPS and cell phones slow play? The players like the gadgets and many would not or could not play without being connected to the outside world.
- The reputation of a “slow playing course” can hurt player draw.
- Player Assistance programs are helpful if implemented politely. The challenge has been to staff these programs during times of budget cuts.
- High school coaches don’t seem to be helping the issue by enabling players with a sense of entitlement. Pre-shot routines have become too long, Professional golf is also not helping the issue.

Discounting and 3rd Party Providers

- Are we hurting each other by continuing to lower prices?
- The issue of quality versus quantity. Who is willing to pay for what?
- There are so many fee structures today that hardly anyone is paying “rack rate”.

Family Golf and Junior Golf

- This has become very popular at many courses that have evening programs.
- Children are likely to play more if parents play with them.
- Junior tees are very popular so that the children play a scale course. It also is helping pace of play.
- Promotions are being successfully run at schools.
- Junior leagues and tournaments are becoming more popular.

Marketing

- Courses are branding themselves for a specific niche player market.

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- Digital marketing is growing via email blasts. The consensus ideal time frame to send email blasts was every 10-14 days with various promotions and newsworthy items. Email blasts can be segmented to target defectors and new acquisitions.
- The goal is to continue to grow the player data base.
- Print marketing is still used based on player demographics.
- Text messaging is an effective tool. Texting offers are being used for spontaneous openings. Surprising to learn this is not age restrictive.
- Who does the marketing at each facility?
- Is social media effective? Twitter, Facebook?
- With the last minute nature of booking, smartphone communication is growing.

Green Aerification

- Everybody recognized this necessary process needs to be done.
- The best time and best technique will vary with each facility depending on playing schedules, fee structures and expectations. There is no USGA “cookie cutter” recipe.
- It is always better to inform people beforehand, so they won’t be surprised and disappointed.

Outings

- What do you do when an outing books for 130 and shows up with 60? Set a contract price with minimums,

- give options and reserve the right to fill in openings.
- Not for profit fundraisers have become very common. There are fewer overall outings today than 10 years ago.

2012 Golf Season

- Was it good because of the good weather? = YES
- Was it good because Medinah hosted the Ryder Cup? = YES
- Was it good because demand was higher? = Not so much
- Most courses were looking to capitalize on potential favorable winter weather in 2013.

The Future of Public Golf

- Most attendees felt positive about the future of the business of golf.
- Some people still felt there were too many courses and not enough players.

It was actually quite interesting to sit in and learn about the business of golf from the all the different perspectives of the attendees. I know sometimes we get “tunnel vision” on the turf and are not always exposed to the big picture. The round table discussions are lively and sometimes can be entertaining when conflicting view-points are discussed. After all, this group is competing against each other, but much like our Associations they see a value in sharing information for the betterment of the game. I encourage you to make plans for the 2013 Public Golf Summit. **-OC**

