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For a group of course designers, builders and shapers who didn't even know what social media was 5 years ago, we certainly spend a lot of time thinking about it these days. Maybe you're like we were 18 months ago — determined to do something in that realm (to better communicate with your customers) but not at all sure how to go about it.

Well, there are dozens of “valuable” ways to do it, and we keep developing new strategies as we go along. We wanted to share a couple of those with you here.

Let me say first that as superintendents and club/course managers, you have a leg up on us course designers and contractors. We at Lohmann Golf Designs and our sister construction firm, Golf Creations, are doing all the basic things we should:

- Creating a central, “branded” portal— the blog at our website — where colleagues and customers can read our news, be engaged, respond and generally interact;
- Regularly supplying that blog with new content (so visitors always have something new to read);
- Providing via Facebook further, image-centric content that is informational, not sales-driven; and

- Using Facebook and Twitter (along with our traditional e-mailing list) to drive colleagues and customers to our blog/website.

But while we really do avoid “selling” our services via all this content, we are continually seeking out and trying to engage with a disparate community of potential customers. Private golf clubs and daily-fee facilities are lucky — they have their communities ready made. It's just a matter of how to best engage them via social media.

Here's an approach we stumbled upon with some of our recent clients:

To start, we've reoriented the way we work with golf properties overall. Today we basically dice up a traditional master renovation plan into smaller chunks that can be tackled annually, if the money is there. In this economy, we've found that clubs are better able to swallow these smaller bites in an orderly, productive, cost-effective fashion. We call this an Asset Management Plan, or AMP.

We're formulating an AMP for a semi-private club client in Wisconsin and we're going to use social media to communicate the scope of that AMP. It makes sense if you think about it. First, it's easy to get members or regular golfing patrons to like a club's Facebook page or visit the blog — they're already interacting with the club online. So instead of asking members and golfers to digest the contents of a multi-faceted, multi-year master plan or AMP all at once, we're planning to dole the information out to them bit by bit via the club's blog, and then drive traffic to the blog with Facebook posts.



Would you follow your local gas station on Facebook?

For example, one week we might discuss tree removal happening on one hole, and use that to discuss the overarching tree removal plans we have for the entire course. The next week we might address the club's investment in a more aggressive top-dressing program, its effect on every day playing conditions like firmness and ball roll. That post might evolve into a further discussion on why a couple of greens still aren't satisfactory, or aren't responding to the program, and may need to be rebuilt or re-grassed.

This approach serves a bunch of really practical purposes:

- It keeps the membership and golfing customer base apprised of what's happening at their course, in an informational way.
- It provides an avenue for promoting common maintenance activities, like top-dressing, in a way that golfers can understand, like better ball roll.
- It demonstrates that investment in the course has been planned out and staged in a logical, cost-efficient way.
- It provides them the opportunity for feedback, because all these social media portals allow for and inherently encourage that feedback.
- And it gets members in the habit of visiting the website and Facebook page, where there's lots of other information the club wants to communicate.



*This local course resident might be worthy of a FB post.*

I had to laugh the other day when I visited my local gas station, which, like many do, has a convenience store attached. It's all part of a big chain of gas/convenience stores. There was a sign on the door that urged me "Follow us on Facebook!" For what, I thought? I'm not going to follow them on Facebook — I don't care enough about where I buy gas and soda.

But golf courses are different. If you make an effort to stock your blog and Facebook page with meaningful information about your course, the people who play that course will continually come back for more. Most courses have been collecting the email information on members and greens-fee-paying golfers for a long time. Use that list to drive them to your Facebook page. Then tell them what you're doing, like why you've rebuilt or moved a bunker, and how that change will improve play for seniors or ladies, for example.

Here's the important bit: It's our view here at LGD and Golf Creations that the superintendent can and should be the point person for generating that meaningful social media content. He

or she is the person who knows the most about what's happening on the property's most important asset: the golf course. He or she is also on the course every day, meaning he or she can deliver timely info and pictures for your social media portals, every day.

When there's wildlife captured on film (okay, digitally), that's a picture and a FB post.

When you re-edge the bunkers surrounding a particular green, that's a picture, FB post and maybe a blog entry.

When you've drawn up a schedule to punch the greens, that's something golfers will want to know.

We've seen some great "Sunrise Series", where each week the super features a different hole at sunrise—a beautiful time of day that most golfers don't experience.



Even quite technical green-keeping can be featured and explained in this sort of context. We know of supers who have applied plant growth regulator to really lush rough areas in front of ladies tees prior to an invitational — to increase roll in those areas and lessen the chances of lost balls there. That's something most supers don't broadcast (cause they don't want to have to do it on a regular basis!), but tell those ladies via social media you've made special efforts to keep the grass down, they'll appreciate the attention.

Here's another fun and interesting social-media worthy experiment: One of our superintendent friends purposely didn't put any tee markers out the first two weeks of the season — he wanted to see where people would play the holes from, on their own. He reported that almost always golfers played more forward than he would have traditionally "marked" them. That's good info for a superintendent to have, and interesting information to share with golfers, especially in the vain of Tee It Forward.

Of course, in all these cases where you are generating fun imagery, Instagram and PinInterest are two more social media options that are very photo-centric.

The possibilities are pretty much endless, and that's a good thing because implementing this sort of social media campaign is a bit like holding a tiger by the tail. Once you start, you've really got to stay with it or interest will fall away (this is especially true for Twitter). But this is the new best way to communicate with your golfers, and there are dozens of ways to customize it, you just need to find your way. @