

## Golf 20/20 showcases new ideas for a new year

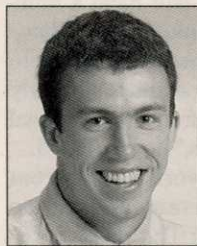
The amount of research and statistics that came out of this year's Golf 20/20 conference was staggering. No matter the question, there seemed to be a number or figure to answer it. Want to know how many par 3 courses there are in New Mexico? Consider it done. Need the number of potential "best" customers that are interested in golf? No problem.

All of this is in the interest of growing the game of golf. As we covered on our news pages this month, the goal is to have 55 million participants playing 1 billion rounds a year by 2020.

How does all of this quantifying and segmenting add up to more golfers and more rounds some 18 years into the future? That question is tougher to answer.

The idea is that the research will help the industry improve marketing efforts by enabling golf courses and player development programs to better target both the potential and existing golfing population.

The demographic figures will help the National Golf Course Owners Association and the PGA of America decide where to start Link Up 2 Golf program sites. The segmenting of the golf population into the "best" potential golfers will assist courses and



Andrew Overbeck, editor

to "traditional" facilities.

The initiatives being driven by this research, however, are long-term projects. What can be done right now to increase traffic on golf courses?

### IMPLEMENT NEW IDEAS FOR FASTER RESULTS

By far the most interesting (and entertaining) session at the conference was moderated by David Brannon, the retired chairman of Dunlop Slazenger Corp. Entitled "New Ideas," Brannon peppered the audience with ideas that could help add players to the game immediately.

The primary barrier to the game, said Brannon, is cost and time. He outlined several audiences that could offer instant

companies in marketing their services. Ongoing research on "alternative" facilities is expected to drive traffic

results. Brannon pointed out that there are 409 million airline tickets and 86 million professional sports tickets sold each year. Additionally, there are 47 million Americans that belong to associations like the PTA and the Red Cross. Offering discounts on golf to these ticket stub holders and frequency discounts to members of associations could drive traffic to golf courses.

for a third of the price, or allow golfers to pay just for the holes they play.

### INCREASE THE COMFORT ZONE

Other barriers to the game include the comfort levels of beginning golfers and the stigma of golf as a high society game. To solve these problems, Brannon suggested giving free lessons, allowing players to "sample" a brand new course for free, and having special tee times for beginners. Even more creative was his idea to have two holes on every green, one big one for beginners in the middle of each green and one regulation-sized cup elsewhere. Other ideas included improving community involvement and visibility by having "town days" at a course or hosting 4th of July fireworks.

Sure, many of these ideas are not new. But discussing ideas, thoughts and initiatives will encourage the industry to think outside the box. Go ahead and try something new this year. Heck, step way outside the box and place personal ads. And when you find something that works, share it with the industry because everyone benefits from new ideas.

As Brannon said, "Don't wait until 2020, strike while the iron is hot!"

### GOLF 20/20 PERSONAL AD

**GOLFERS WANTED:** 18-hole golf course seeking golfers who are more concerned with "ball striking" than with "scoring." Must be between the ages of 40 and 64, have an income of at least \$75k, and no longer have small children living at home. Interest in sports, traveling, cell phones, and investing a plus. No scratch golfers please! ☎ 137682

According to Brannon, courses could solve the time factor by being more flexible in tee times and pricing. Courses could offer a "quick 6"

## Surviving tough economic times requires creativity

In challenging economic times, golf course builders, architects and superintendents must take an active role in meeting business challenges. There is a domino effect in the golfing industry just like in the U.S. economy. If the restaurant at a golf course experiences a bad year in 2001, a course maintenance budget in 2002 might face cutbacks. If a developer's finances start drying up, the new golf course down the street may not get off the ground this year, or the next.

As the soft market works to sort out supply and demand issues, the U.S. economy remains slightly unstable. Businesses are tightening their belts, and many of those with money to invest continue to play the "wait and see" game. That prevailing economic attitude will continue to impact the golf industry.

An article on page one offers the perspective of golf course builders and architects evaluating and anticipating what this year has in store for their businesses, specifically on renovation work. Golf course design and construction companies are certainly bracing for the impact from new development hiccups and delays in the financial and permitting processes required for new construction.

"It's safe to say there will be a reduction in new course construction based on the economy and on the fact that a number of new courses built throughout the 1990s came to a head," said Brad Schmidt, vice president of Landscapes Unlimited. "That pace could not last, and new courses have somewhat met demand at this point in time."

The market, however, is not oversaturated with new construction, according to Schmidt. "That term is mistakenly used," he said. "I think the number of courses have met demand for the number of rounds of golf. If you go back to the '70s and '80s, that pendulum swings back and forth. Maybe five or six years down



Joel Joyner, associate editor

the road we'll see where more demand is available, and we'll see new construction go back up again."

In the meantime, renovation projects are expected to play a more significant role in the course construction business. However, there will be some hesitation from clubs, according to Andrew Crouch, director of business development for ASL Golf Course Construction.

"Clubs may go through the planning process with an architect and then just sit and wait on a project until they see more favorable, stable economic conditions in the market," he said. "Right now, there are more and more construction companies coming off a project that don't already have work lined up. For some companies, there's no question that their profits are going to be strained quite heavily in this contraction of the market."

### IMPROVING OPERATIONS

Golf clubs also will be looking to operate more efficiently. Budgets will be trimmed in certain instances as eyes glare more and more toward the bottom line. On page 9 this month, innovative ideas from superintendents may prove useful in coping with more restricted maintenance budgets.

"A lot of the things that we do to save money and time on the maintenance end of the golf course are just combinations of things we've seen at other courses," said Mark Hoban, superintendent at The Standard Club in Duluth, Ga. At Hoban's club, used electric golf cars are converted into utility vehicles, saving the facility thousands of dollars and allowing for a more efficient operation.

At the Palo Duro Creek Golf Course in Nogales, Ariz., superintendent Sam Orozco took matters into his own hands when financing went dry during the renovation of his maintenance facility. Not only did Orozco save his money-strapped club thousands of dollars by completing construction work in-house, but he was able to build the morale of his employees.

"The way I see it is, if there's a need, I try to meet that need," said Orozco.

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