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# Question your clientele

At long last, golf course owners and managers are becoming more marketing savvy. Most know their operational business well, but I'm receiving more pointed questions about specific areas of golf course marketing instead of questions about general problems. Here are 10 often-asked marketing questions:

1. At what price point would golfers play my course more frequently?
2. What do I do when I know I have a problem with member attrition but don't know why?
3. Are the discounts being offered at my competitors' courses affecting loyalty at mine?
4. Where are my core golfers coming from?
5. How do I determine what amenities to offer members and in what priority?
6. How far are golfers traveling to play my course?
7. How do I compete effectively with clubs that offer more amenities?
8. What do I do when my competitors' courses seem packed regularly and mine isn't?
9. What other courses do my frequent players favor?
10. How should I react if my competitors discount rounds?

The simple answer – although it's often-times met with, "Yeah, I hadn't thought of that" – is to survey your members or players. Ask them what's missing, what they want or what would enhance the value of your club to them. A combination of member and player surveys and focus groups can reveal existing and potential problems of which management might not be readily aware. However, keep in mind the difference between a member survey and a player survey.

## Annual member survey

A member survey helps reveal members' opinions about the course and what changes they'd like to see. The survey should cover every aspect of a club's recreational and business offerings, from course conditions to facility amenities and everything in between. Ask them for their feedback and encourage their opinions.

Often, a member survey is the best way for owners and managers to know what's really going on at a club. It provides the members a sense that the owners and man-

agers care about their opinions. Don't be afraid if you think your survey is too long because members don't mind sharing their opinions. To make tabulating the results easy, use as many multiple choice or yes or no answers as possible. Some questions, however, beg to be open ended. Though a bit more difficult to tabulate accurately, open-ended questions usually can be sorted into four or five general answers. Topics to address in your survey might include:

- Membership structure and dues
- Club access
- Current and future amenities
- Pace of play
- Guest policies
- Member events
- Instruction
- Player development
- Handicap service
- Dress code
- Staff service
- Food-and-beverage offerings and service
- Golf shop offerings and service
- Club communications.

You should also develop an action plan based on the survey results because you can tell members club leadership is acting on good faith in response to their suggestions. I'm not recommending your club tend to all the suggestions, but I'm sure, after reading the survey results, there will be several ideas that could be acted on immediately at virtually no cost.

The first step to develop an action plan is to determine what was learned from the survey results, which should identify various strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. Organize the responses into these categories and assign priorities based on the club's one-year, three-year, five-year and seven-year financial and profit plan, as well as your members' desires. Don't forget to report on the actions taken in your newsletter. Think of the member goodwill that will be generated.

## Quarterly player survey

Semiprivate and public clubs should implement a plan to survey the pay-to-play golfers, excluding members, to assess their opinions of the facilities' conditions and determine what influences their decision to play the course, as well as the others.

The player survey has to be much more streamlined than a member survey. A

member might spend as long as a week answering all of the survey questions and offering his opinions, but a player, perhaps, will spend barely a few minutes on a survey. So, limit the number of questions to 10 and provide multiple choice answers only. Cover general topics such as handicap, age, sex, preferred times to play, number of rounds played annually, what's most and least liked about the course, and the distance traveled to play the course.

Because each facility's greatest resource for increased play is repeat and referral business, your facility should conduct a quarterly review of its customer base. Here are steps to take for conducting a player survey:

- The manager should schedule a survey week each quarter of the year. The survey should be handed out for seven consecutive days so it can represent all segments patronizing the course.

- The manager should determine an effective and appropriate incentive, such as a free beverage or daily drawing, to reward customers for filling out a survey and returning it. The returns on this kind of a survey are low (5 percent to 10 percent), so it's important to have the entire staff encouraging customers to fill them out.

- The atmosphere should be friendly while handing out the surveys. You're asking customers to do you a favor, so you should make sure they realize the information is important and meaningful to the operation and service to them.

## Valuable insight

Whether the survey you conduct is for members or players, the research information you gather will be used as a barometer to gauge real and/or perceived problems that might need to be addressed at your club. The first few surveys will provide basic insight into your audience. However, with the compilation of repeated surveys, you'll begin to gain valuable insight into who's playing your course and why. The information will go a long way to help you market your course more effectively.

Your members or daily-fee players can provide you with much needed insights that will allow you to make critical decisions for the future success of your course. Ask them. GCN