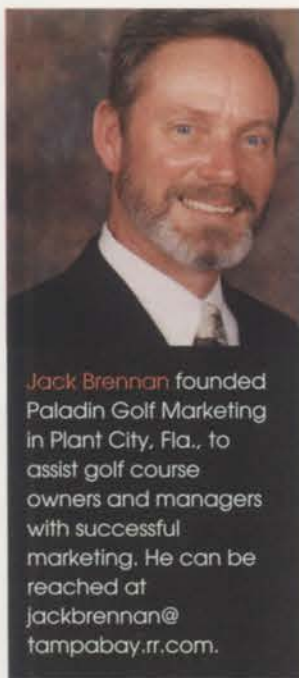


Spurring more ideas



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Last year, this month's column was devoted to identifying and solving problems through marketing solutions. Solving a facility's real problem(s) is effective marketing and effective operations. However, just conceiving marketing ideas that sound good or are dreamed up as a knee-jerk reaction to a real or perceived problem are, at best, mediocre, short-term promotions.

Problems aren't solved by creative, even ingenious, marketing promotions, but rather by marketing programs that address long-term solutions or goals based on a course's unique market position. You shouldn't confuse them.

Last month, I addressed the notion of possibly running out of marketing ideas for your facility in its unique market. The premise was that if you frequently believe you've run out of ideas to help your facility succeed, it's possible you're losing your passion for the business because you simply can't run out of marketing ideas. They're all around you – pervasive in life. They simply need to be modified appropriately to serve your facility in its market.

In preparation for last month's column, I e-mailed a network of golf industry people and asked them what they do if and when they find themselves uncreative and at a loss for marketing ideas. Their input might help inspire you:

Brian Gaines, regional vice president of business development for Meadowbrook Golf: "I keep files (paper and electronic) of every marketing idea I've ever come across and categorize them according to product type (private, semiprivate, daily fee, resort, etc.). Then, when I need an idea and am lacking inspiration, I'll go back and thumb through the files to see if one of them jumps out as being appropriate to a situation or sometimes spawns a different variation."

An advertising guy once said: "There are no new marketing ideas, only old ones that have been brought back or reworked." This isn't completely true, but there's value in the suggestion.

Mike Miraglia, Fore Golf Associates: "When I'm out of ideas, we go back to the old tried-and-true promotions, aka the basics or fundamentals, basically going back through history and finding the promotional items that worked the best and running one of those."

Douglas K. Spear, president of Spear Consultants: "When you run out of ideas, seek out someone who hasn't run out of marketing ideas, such as a professional."

Arthur Jeffords, president of Herberton Lighthouse Golf: "The best marketing idea, whether before or after you run out of other marketing ideas, is to remember that the best customer to market to is the one you already have. The better you treat and service your current customers, the more they'll return and remain loyal in spite of the marketing or discounting of the competition. They'll also recommend you to others and bring their friends. Good old-fashioned customer service still works, and customers appreciate and remember it. And, as always, if we all 'just say no' to discounting, then the industry will be better off."

John Reger, general manager of Haile Plantation Golf & Country Club: "Network. If you're in the golf

business, you have an incredible network of people willing to help you: PGA of America, U.S. Golf Association, National Golf Foundation, not to mention friends and associates. Ask around. You won't run out of marketing ideas if you care to succeed in today's golf market."

Dick Weiss, managing partner of Strategic Shaft Technologies (SST-PURE) and golf course owner: "Survey your members or players and ask what would encourage them to frequent the club more often. They might just tell ya."

Gerry Black, president of Relax Communications: "I once read about the idea of sitting down with a piece of paper and writing out a '100 ways to increase sales' list. You might not get close to 100, but it will force you to focus on things you aren't currently doing. A lot of times, people run out of ideas because they're too lazy to use their imagination. They try the traditional stuff, and then that's it."

Marc Brady, general manager of Tryon Country Club: "When all else seems to be faltering, educate your customers. Invite your members/guests to a forum about golf course 'agronomy 101.' Market yourself, your superintendent and staff to your members/guests by educating them about

what you studied, your course issues, your typical work day, basic agronomy, etc. Quell rumors. We often hear various suggestions/solutions from members that are so far from reality, but they don't know the business of golf. Help them learn about the business side. They'll appreciate it."

Danny Mays, president of Maverick Golf: "As an owner of a course, the only way I can truly understand the market surrounding any golf property – and they're all very different – is to take the time to ride the course (or sit on the first tee or putting green) and ask basic marketing questions about your type of facility (what's the daily fee, how did you hear about the course, how far did you drive, how did you get here) along with a

visit to your competition (That's always a fun one because the golf business is seemingly a turf war in some markets, usually the over-supplied one where there's discounting.)

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to discuss the global golf market and how to get more rounds to the area. Usually, I find the absentee owner or large management company staff is afraid to open up, thus, perhaps listening to their customers while visiting might give you the insight into their successful avenues of marketing.

"The answer could simply be reprioritizing the existing staff's focus away from less productive tasks and communicating the importance of seeking good, realistic market information versus playing golf with Bernice Goldbloom in the afternoon."

Al Martell, Castle & Cooke: "When I run out of marketing ideas, I call my consultant. If and when he runs out of ideas, we're all in trouble."

The above should give you practical understanding of what some influential people think about marketing and developing marketing ideas. It can be difficult for some, but for those who make marketing an everyday practice, it can come naturally. When marketing becomes part of your everyday work routine, you'll soon realize that you're successful, too.

Success comes to those who market wisely. GCN