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## WHAT'S IN THE INBOX?

One day, I decided it would be educational for my kids to hear about what it was like to work in a magazine office in olden times. I regaled them with descriptions of rotary telephones that were actually dialed, typewriters that made a “click clack” sound, blue language that would make a crack junkie cringe, ink-stained copy editors wearing fedoras and smoking fat cigars, and the time-honored tradition of chasing buxom young secretaries around desks. My kids seemed to really like that last part, but then snuck away to play Wii.

My daily routine back then included sorting through a dozen envelopes containing press releases from various manufacturers, firms and associations in the golf business. The majority were straightforward and not exactly earth-shaking.

Times have changed. I can't remember the last time I received an old-fashioned paper press release via snail-mail. Instead, they arrive in my e-mail inbox with a deceptively pleasant ding. And arrive and arrive and arrive. E-mail has made it too easy to send announcements to the media. Instead of eight or 10 a day, it's often dozens. I still try to read most of them, but my finger usually hovers over the delete key as I do so.

I hesitate to call many of these digital announcements news releases. Few, if any, are newsworthy in the “stop the presses” sense. And even fewer contain anything I didn't already know. Interesting product innovations have usually been “sneak previewed” in the market for months before an official announcement is made. And, I often hear through the grapevine about personnel changes ages before a company or golf facility gets around to telling editors about them formally.

Yet, I received two news releases recently that got my complete and immediate attention.

The first was about John Deere agreeing to buy Lesco. It was no surprise to anyone

Lesco wanted to sell. Rumors had been flying for years. The company had done everything short of putting a “For Sale” sign in front of its Cleveland headquarters. Its shareholders – big institutional investors who are interested in profits – wanted out.

Lesco is a great company with a long tradition of service and success in the green industry. But during the years since founder Jim FitzGibbon retired and subsequently passed away, things had changed. It went public, deviated from its core distribution business and unwisely misjudged customer loyalty by eliminating its golf

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sales team. Independent distributors, who feared extinction during Lesco's meteoric rise, fought back hard. Thus, the Goliath of the industry felt the impact of the hard work of many smaller Davids.

Lesco forgot its roots and floundered, particularly in geographic areas where small, nimble independent distributors provided better service and support. The lesson is that you can be a powerhouse business, but people buy from people. If you forget that, you won't succeed.

That said, there's no better company than Deere to try to take on the challenge of fixing the Lesco network. The acquisition has the potential to increase the presence of John Deere Landscapes significantly on the lawn-care side of the business. Its impact on golf is yet to be seen. The question is whether Deere can or will even try to maintain the Lesco brand in the golf

market in light of its commitment to the Deere One Source concept.

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At first blush, it seems like a slick idea. It's a decent profile-raiser for the GCSAA and, theoretically, will help relationships between tournament host superintendents and the LPGA staff and players. But, consider it a little more, and maybe you'll wonder about the same things I did. Who's paying for it? Is it a potential conflict for a GCSAA staff person to be in this position? Is this the beginning of a larger effort by the GCSAA to get into the agronomic consulting business?

Bryce Gartner, the GCSAA's managing director of marketing, says the association will fund salary and related costs of the position, but the LPGA will cover most travel expenses. However, he says the GCSAA will receive considerable promotional opportunities to communicate the value of GCSAA members through many of the LPGA media outlets.

Also, Gartner describes the new job as a liaison who helps the host superintendent and LPGA agree on conditioning issues: “The agronomist will assist in this translation to help set expectations on both sides. Additionally, the agronomist will assist the LPGA in focusing its efforts on more uniform playing conditions week to week.”

Finally, he says the positives in the relationship far outweighed the negatives. Good answers, for the most part, but I still wonder how it will work.

Am I alone in my concern the GCSAA is shelling out major bucks to maybe have an impact on how a tournament host superintendent is perceived at LPGA events – where there's never been much of an image problem to my knowledge – or, of perhaps greater concern, that the association is getting in the business of consulting in which a member of the staff has to try to serve two masters? That's my take. What do you think? **GCI**