



Jack Brennan founded Paladin Golf Marketing in Plant City, Fla., to assist golf course owners and managers with successful marketing. He can be reached at jackbrennan@tampabay.rr.com.

BE PREPARED FOR NEXT YEAR

“If you don't know where you're going, then any road will take you there.”

I don't remember the author of this quote, but it's a fitting beginning for a column attempting to define golf course marketing.

There's a misunderstanding that marketing is merely advertising. I receive inquiries from prospective clients explaining they need marketing help for their golf courses. In response, the first questions I want answered are: How much do you know about your market? How much do you know about your competition? Are you positioned properly based on the quality of the facility versus your pricing?

Surprisingly, while my clients try answering these questions, they often interrupt themselves to let me know the answers to them are unimportant. What they really want to know is what advertising they should be implementing, or to let me know they've tried everything and nothing works.

Advertising is a part of marketing, but marketing isn't advertising. Marketing is conducting research necessary to offer a product to an audience who likely will respond favorably.

Marketing includes all those research activities – competitor analysis, positioning, demographic growth analysis, economic growth analysis, consumer and facility demand analysis, supply versus demand, market growth/decline of supply, per capita play rates, play rates by type of golf facility, golfer participation, frequency of play per golfer, market age and household income analysis – that contribute to the development, pricing, communication and promotion of your golf course. Promotion is the marketing element, which includes advertising, used to communicate your course's message and offerings to prospective customers. Promotion also influences those potential golfers to play your course repeatedly.

Marketing also includes planning ahead. You can't determine where you need to be if you don't know where you are. The best

advice I can give at this time of the year: Be prepared for next year.

Every one of my client's is unique because they exist in a different marketplace. The basic research is the same, but you have to apply the interpretations of the research to the marketplace. For example, if I was working in Scottsdale, Ariz., a section of my marketing plan would focus on partnerships with hotels, motels and timeshares to reach potential customers. However, this relatively large portion of potential business and section of the marketing plan for a client in Scottsdale is worthless in rural Kentucky where my last client had no lodging facilities within 35 miles of the course.

If you've never written a marketing plan for your golf course, follow these five simple steps, and you'll have the beginnings of a dynamic marketing plan.

Step 1. Write down all business segments of play that you've been able to capture at your course this year. Include the number of rounds and revenue generated from each segment. (See table below.)

Example	Number	Revenue
Membership rounds	10,000	\$470,000
Outside play	14,000	\$714,000
Tournaments	3,000	\$156,000
Outings	2,000	\$104,000
League play	2,000	\$58,000

Step 2. Write down all the potential business segments of play that exist in your market that you can conceive: membership (full, single, social, etc.), outside play (weekday, weekend), tournaments/outings (social, charity, corporate, mini tours, pro events, etc.), league play, hotel play (transient, packages), special seniors, juniors (clinics, camps), etc.

If you can identify that the segment of play exists in your market place, write it down. Even if, for 2008, you know you

won't get that segment of play, write it down. Then find out how the club with that play is faring with that segment of business. For example, a segment of play that few clubs would have is a PGA Tour or Champions Tour event. But if that play exists in your market, call the pro, manager or owner and ask them how that play contributes to the success of their business. In this example, it might be that the event costs them money, and management offsets that cost with sales in a development. Now you know.

Try the same thing with all the segments of play until you know your golf market thoroughly. And, by doing this, you'll know your competition better, too.

Step 3. Focus on the play segments that currently demand play at your course. Then focus on the play that you're not getting, or not getting enough of, based on your competitors. Then conceive of promotional ways to better invite or solicit that segment of opportunity play.

Step 4. Create a promotional budget that you can justify for every segment of business you intend to capture. Don't think of the traditional forms of advertising such as newspaper, radio, magazines and TV only. For example, consider tournaments and outings. It might be as simple as recognizing you host a fair amount of charitable outings but not as much as your competition, and you realize none of the staff has ever solicited this business directly by phoning them. I almost guarantee your chamber of commerce has a listing of charitable organizations that you can get or buy. Most likely, you did business with one of them when they called you. Pick up the phone and call them before they call your competition.

Step 5. Repeat Step 4 over and over again.

The perfect time for all your research and marketing reorganization is Thanksgiving through January 1 no matter where you're located. No one is in a buying mood, it's during the holidays, and the next year seems a long way off. Prepare then, and you'll be able to book more business between January 2 and Easter, which is prime selling season for all golf courses. **GCI**