



John Walsh
Editor

BUILD A BRAND

During my travels the past couple years, I've heard several speakers talk about branding and the importance a brand has in the success of a business. They've lectured about brand development and how it helps manufacturers, distributors and even magazines like this one. Building a brand helps identify the value of a business, and if a brand is well known, it's supposed to make selling for that business much easier. That, in turn, makes the business more profitable – the obvious goal of all businesses.

A brand helps enhance marketing positions, allows companies to set premium pricing, builds market loyalty and differentiates a business from its competitors. A brand has value, and sometimes part of that value is intangible. Marketing professionals say small companies, even a single golf facility, can build a brand. A brand not only includes the product you offer (e.g., the best-conditioned golf course for your dollar), but services as well. And every person who works at a golf facility is part of those product and service components of a brand. In golf, your brand is an experience because the only thing a golfer can take with him when he leaves the course are items from the pro shop, but that's not the main reason why golfers come to your facility to begin with. It's not the main reason for the business. The course is.

The keys to building your brand are: having a committed focus, recognizing your core competencies and values, consistently delivering your product and services, and providing an atmosphere for pleasant golf experiences. Ultimately, the brand helps your customers build confidence in your business because they know what to expect.

As a golf course superintendent, being in contact with the golfers at your course daily is part of building your facility's brand. Explaining to golfers why course conditions are the way they are and finding out what they prefer improves their experience. If your greens are being aerated, do you let golfers know? Do you explain why they're being aerated? Aside from course conditioning, which is the most common way for you to help differentiate your course from others, do you help build your facility's brand and improve golfers' experiences by recommending various types of services to offer customers (babysitting, shoe cleaning and car washes are examples)? Even if you can't actually implement those services because you're busy maintaining the golf course, see to it your ideas to better the facility are presented.

Brands such as Apple, McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Mercedes are some of the most recognized brands in the world. Golf facility examples include Augusta, Pinehurst, Bandon Dunes and Pebble Beach. Analyze those facilities' operations to see if there's something you can glean from them to adapt to your operation and market. Keep in mind you don't have to be known nationally to have a well-respected, strong brand. However, you might end up building your brand to the point where it is known nationally.

Does your golf facility have a brand identity in your local or regional market? If so, can it be strengthened? What are you doing to help build your facility's brand? Are other managers, such as the golf pro and general manager, doing their part? Are you all on the same page regarding the need to build brand awareness to better your business? If not, maybe it's time to sit down and define your brand and execute a plan to develop it. By doing so, your facility might not suffer as much during difficult economic times and might outperform competitors during healthy times. A strong, well-defined brand betters business. So be aggressive and innovative and help define or improve your facility's brand. You'll be better off for it. **GCI**

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