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EVALUATE YOUR BUSINESS

As I begin my farewell after five years of penning a marketing column for this magazine, it's fitting I'm standing in my garage, having taken everything off the walls, from the shelves and out of every nook and cranny where stuff has accumulated for 18 years.

I didn't realize it when I began my garage cleanup, but this is almost the same process I go through to create clients' marketing strategies and tactics for their annual marketing plans. I tear the existing plans apart, look at each individual element and put them back in order with some semblance of rationale – a marketing rationale for increasing net revenues by taking advantage of oppor-

tunities not recognized or ignored in the past.

Creating your annual golf course marketing plan is a process of objectively recognizing everything you do to promote business and determining what's working and what's not generating profitable revenue at your course. More often than not, it also requires creating new strategies and tactics to reach all of your target segments of opportunity play. Like my garage cleanup, be prepared to throw out things that have no useful or foreseeable benefit to your course in the form of driving new, repeat or referral business.

All too often, golf course owners have other business interests, and they fail to get their hands dirty by reflecting on the promotion of their golf course annually. By not doing so, and not questioning the promotional tactics of the club, they're passively encouraging the club staff to continue as is, mistakes and all. How do you recognize marketing errors when you and your staff are doing the same things you've always done? If you don't know the right questions to ask, find someone who does. They can potentially save you a lot of time and money.

Recently, I visited a new client for the first time. He owns an upscale signature course and development in Pennsylvania. His inner circle management team is full of bright, successful folks but not golf people. After I was given a history of the course and development, it didn't take many questions to determine the primary marketing mistakes being made year after year since 1997. The chart on this page is a reminder of what should be included in your next annual marketing plan.

There are many important marketing lessons for golf course owners, and no one is more important than another. During the past five years, I've enjoyed sharing those lessons with you.

During the past 25 years, we've seen our industry change dramatically. Throughout the 1990s, the market became oversupplied with courses, and the problem wasn't recognized until about 1997. Golfer participation rates decreased in the midst of the decade's growth and only made it back to 1991 levels in the early 2000s. Today, they're flat at best. Fuel prices are eating into our profit margins like never before. And now, with the threat of recession, our credit market has dried up.

If you want to thwart these and other problem areas that will befall us inevitably, remember above all this one marketing tip: Talk to your customers. Survey them consistently because they're your lifeblood, and they'll always steer your course in the right direction.

Farewell and sláinte. **GCI**

ANYWHERE USA GOLF COURSE MARKETING PLAN

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