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CREATE OR UPDATE YOUR PLAN

During the holidays, I had a business experience that made my new year brighter. Maybe my experience will assist you when you create or update your next golf course marketing plan.

A recently hired general manager contacted me through my Web site and informed me he was assigned to create a marketing plan for his course by January 1. He wanted a few minutes of my time to help organize his thoughts for a plan. Although my wife and I were vacationing for the holidays, I gave him a call to see how I could help. After a few minutes, I could tell

he was feeling pressure from the responsibility of generating a marketing plan. Once I got a feel for the type of course, general market information, rounds, rates, competition, etc. (he was informed about his new course, which helped me), I began to explain the different sections of a marketing plan he should write for it to be meaningful.

A few minutes turned into more than an hour. I could tell he was feverishly writing what I was telling him, so I suggested sending him a bullet-pointed outline of what he should include in his unique marketing plan and promised to review it with him.

I made some modifications to my table-of-contents template to address his unique market better based on what he told me and e-mailed it to him. When I called him, he not only sounded appreciative, but it was as if a light bulb had gone on in the innate marketing side of his brain.

The most important part of creating a marketing plan is gathering meaningful research. Without accurate research and the correct interpretation of the research, a marketing plan is just a hit-and-miss guide. It's better than no plan, but it will take a few seasons to pinpoint where the true, most profitable target audiences are.

Here's what I sent the general manager I hope it will help anybody who wants to write a marketing plan but doesn't know where to begin.

Purpose statement. Give the reasons you're preparing a marketing plan. For example, "The following marketing plan has been prepared to quantify, in rounds and revenue, 2008 sales and marketing goals for XYZ Golf Club." Explain how you intend to do that.

Daily sales objectives and tasks.

Explain what you'll do to influence rounds and revenue on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis to your course. Make it read like a sales and marketing job description.

Golf market overview. Give a general description of your golf market – private club versus public courses, resort/destination market, municipal facilities, etc. Explain where your course fits in to the competitive golf market grid (positioning) and how you'll compete. What will you do differently than your competition?

Golf rounds demand analysis. Read my July 2007 and September 2007 columns (www.golfcourseindustry.com) for a detailed explanation.

Primary business targets. This section will likely change for every golf course. Some golf markets focus heavily on outing business; others don't. Golf courses in destination markets will focus a significant part of their marketing plans on partnerships with lodging facilities. Golf markets aren't the same. To identify your most profitable business targets and create marketing programs to invite those targets to your course, you must be able to rely on accurate market research and the correct interpretation of that research. See my November 2007 column.

Competitor analysis. Identify your competition based on your primary targets of play. Do what you can to identify their share (number of rounds) of those targets and evaluate what resources (time and money) need to be spent on getting your fair share.

Sales and marketing strategies and tactics. For each of your target business segments, your strategy is your goal. For example, "I plan to increase my outing business by 3,000 rounds." Your tactics are what you'll actually do to increase that segment.

I called the general manager the next two days to check on his progress. He did a fine job writing the plan, but he will need to continue conducting market research before the plan will be reliable and viable. **GC**

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- III. Golf market overview
- IV. Golf rounds demand analysis:
 1. Consumer reported rounds (population)
 2. Facility reported rounds
- V. Primary business targets
 - A. Geographic:
 1. Local
 2. Regional
 3. Feeder markets (if any)
 - B. Marketing programs (forms and letters included)
 1. Memberships
 2. Group business
 3. Marketing to tournament and outing coordinators
 4. Hotel/motel partnership programs
 5. Frequent player program
 6. Outside play
- VI. Competitor analysis
- VII. 2007 Sales and marketing strategies and tactics
- VIII. 2007 Sales and marketing revenue plan
- IX. 2007 Advertising and promotions
 - A. Advertising and promotion overview
 - B. Advertising and promotion plan/budget
 - C. Marketing budget rationale
 - D. Research – quarterly survey
 - E. Evaluation of marketing goals
- X. 2008 preplanning calendar