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GOLF 2.0: STRATEGIC PLAN OR PRAYER?

The PGA of America is championing a new initiative to grow the game called Golf 2.0. The concept, which targets the new era in golf, (thus 2.0) aims to substantially boost the number of golfers and much needed revenue.

Is Golf 2.0 a plan for our game's future or a well-conceived prayer?

We are all painfully aware golf is in a skid. According to the National Golf Foundation, the number of golfers declined by about 1 million from 2009 to 2010. The NGF recently posted, "Since 2001 golf rounds have declined 12 percent nationwide, which is the equivalent of 60 million rounds."

I was not familiar with Golf 2.0 until I attended a recent Colorado Golf Summit and heard a presentation by Darrell Crall. Crall is the PGA's Senior Director for Golf 2.0.

According to Crall, Golf 2.0 is envisioned as an industry-wide effort to increase the number of players and the revenue generated by the golf industry. Specifically, the Golf 2.0 vision is to go from 26.1 million golfers and \$33 billion in consumer spending in 2011 to 32 million golfers and \$35 billion in consumer spending by 2016. The 2020 vision is 40-plus million golfers and \$40 billion in consumer spending. (To view Crall's entire presentation go to www.coloradopga.com and click on Golf 2.0)

Based on golfer and non-golfer focus groups and other research, various key demographic and consumer megatrends were developed. In addition the following Golf 2.0 action plan tasks were identified:

- Focus to make the game more relevant, friendly, fun and welcoming to all;
- Reshape the perception, image and environment of the game;
- Redefine how to grow golf participation;
- Adapt to changing consumer profiles and preferences and
- Create meaningful experiences which resonate on an emotional level.

Research by the PGA also identified various classifications of golfers and non-golfers such as: no contact to golf, familiar with golf but don't play, lapsed, don't like the game, etc. Each classification was then evaluated for its respective growth potential. The largest group identified to

grow the game was the lapsed golfer with some barrier; 90 million. Of these 90 million lapsed golfers, 68 percent or 61 million indicated an interest in returning to the game. By contrast the study showed of the 26.1 million current golfers; composed of occasional golfers, regular golfers and heavy golfers, only 9 million indicated an interest in golfing more frequently.

According to the PGA, to meet the goals of Golf 2.0, the industry needs to implement a strategy which:

- Restores and strengthens the core;
- Engages the lapsed golfer and
- Drives new players to the game

"The success of Golf 2.0 depends on each course or club developing an action plan which includes fortifying the core while extending a welcoming hand to the millions of potential golfers waiting on the sidelines."

The \$40 billion question remains, how does the industry achieve the goals of Golf 2.0? At this point no one has all the answers. Another question is what is the superintendent's role in this effort? I believe superintendents are a valuable asset for inclusion in the process.

The PGA golf professional is positioned to take the lead in this initiative. To this end, the PGA has made enhanced training for golf professionals in the recruitment and retention of players a top priority. Superintendents should also embrace this effort. By their very nature, superintendents are great problem solvers and foster innovative ideas all the time.

The time for action is now. The success of Golf 2.0 depends on each course or club developing an action plan which includes fortifying the core while extending a welcoming hand to the millions of potential golfers waiting on the sidelines.

In the final analysis, whether Golf 2.0 becomes a viable plan or turns out to be just a prayer is up to all of us. **GCI**