

by John Torsiello

Social media trending and turf

Is adopting a social media strategy right for you and your turf ops? GCI explores the Pros and Cons.



“Social media also helps address some of the issues you hear about through the grapevine quickly.”

— David Marach
NorthBrook Country Club

“Twitter is good for those quick little updates but the blog is great to show pictures and videos and expound on them.”

— Tim Johansen,
Palmer Hills Golf Club

A brave new world

Social media compliments a professional approach to golf course maintenance.

These days, if you don't stay at least even with the technology curve you'll find yourself swimming against the tide in no time.

Golf course superintendents across the country are turning to social media for a plethora of reasons, including to get the word out about course conditions, communicate with staff, members and the general public, network with others in the industry and research.

Chuck Connolly, superintendent at Greenville Country Club in Greenville, S.C., uses a variety of social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and My Blog, although he rarely uses Facebook because he believes it shares too much personal information.

“I use LinkedIn and maintain an up-to-date profile,” Connolly says. “LinkedIn is more professional and less personal, so I use it more. Twitter is used periodically to update course conditions to membership.”

Connolly blogs bi-weekly to reach out to members. He also finds social media a tool to glean industry information.

Ryan Moore, superintendent at Forest Lake Country Club in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., is hooked on blogging. He runs the maintenance blog at <http://flccgreens.blogspot.com> and uses it as a communication tool for membership, to educate and make them aware of things that are happening on the golf course. He's also recently joined LinkedIn.

“The blog is the best communication tool I have seen,” he says. “I am able to convey the message I would like to communicate, when I want and how I would like it to be presented. I have the ability to deliver my message to the entire membership instead of having to relay the message multiple times and have others change the context as they pass the message on to others. It also serves as an archive for projects and different changes that have

happened to the golf course.”

The blog was instituted last winter to communicate with members instead of traditional posted messages and fliers.

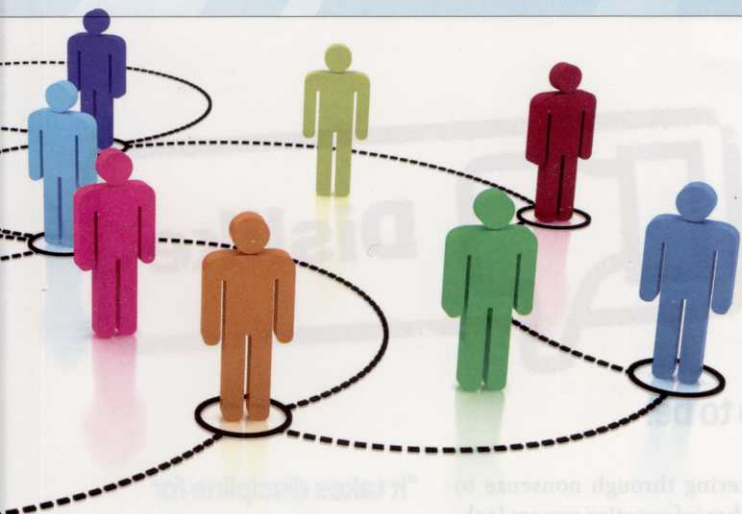
Moore says to keep blogs short and to the point.

“Exercise the message you would like to convey,” Moore says. “I have seen many different ways to communicate through a blog that are effective. But I believe short and to the point, with pictures to support, is the best approach. I find keeping the message positive and avoiding politics helps.”

David Marach, superintendent at NorthBrook Country Club in Luxemburg, Wis., uses Facebook to a large degree. It helps explain with pictures why they are doing what they are doing or what needs to be done in the future.

“It also keeps you in touch with the members through the off-season with what is going on in the Grounds and Greens department — reel grinding, tree maintenance, ice or snow issues,”





4 reasons your members like social media

Many superintendents site the reasons for adopting social media is to use it as a communications tool for club members or regular players at their course. However, there are some other reasons why your course's players appreciate social media.

1

Allows them to make a connection to be engaged and immersed with the course.

2

Enables them to share opinions about the course.

3

Allows quick and easy comparison of what's happening at other facilities and clubs in the area.

4

Validates course conditions and decisions that may impact play.

— Adapted from 2011 research by advertising agency Leo Burnett Worldwide

Social media and the bottom line

Brian Benedict believes a solid social media strategy can help the bottom line.

"Through social media, I am able to look inside other facilities like ours and see the problems they face and how they solve them, as well as seeing how other guys are cutting back to try and save money," he says.

Benedict, superintendent at Seawane Golf Club in Hewlett Harbor, N.Y., is very active with social media, using a public page on Facebook to post pictures when he and his staff undertake bunker restoration or other capital projects. He also sends bi-weekly emails to the membership through the club website to update members on projects and cultural processes to the golf course. He says the mass email has been welcomed by the members because it makes them feel more involved and able to schedule visits with guests around course work.

"The biggest benefit is the communication factor," Benedict says. "Members feel more involved and actually ask questions and genuinely want to know and understand why we perform the processes that we do. I also think that it gives you more credibility because members actually know that you have a plan."

"It helps us do our job better because it gives the members ownership," he adds. "When they know what you're doing there is no second-guessing because everyone is on board with the program. And it can help the bottom line getting projects approved by members due to communication and the effect that it has on their understanding the necessity of the desired project."

When used judiciously and with a specific golf course-oriented focus, social media can be a valuable tool superintendents have at their disposal to "interface" with other superintendents, staff and members instantaneously.

he says. "Social media also helps address some of the issues you hear about through the grapevine quickly. I started last year and I am slowly getting other employees of my department involved since we are usually leaving when most golfers are coming out to play."

Marach is hoping to get onto Twitter soon, as it provides "instant information" to members.

"It really helps here in the spring or after a large rain event to explain why we are not able to open or why we are delayed," he adds.

Marach is convinced using social media has a positive effect on a club's bottom line. "You might have followers that have heard of your golf course but never been there," he says. "You can encourage them to golf or dine because they might be a little more curious. You also might have followers that are not golfers and may become interested in golf. Social media just gives your company and your department more exposure to the public."

Tim Johansen, superintendent at Palmer Hills Golf Club in Bettendorf, Iowa., uses several social media sites, such as Facebook, but he is "trending" more toward Twitter. He also relies on a blog to get the word out about what he

and his staff are doing, and course conditions. But the results have been mixed.

"After seeing an upswing in Twitter use over the winter, I am going to start an account specifically for the golf course and tie it into my blog. Twitter is good for those quick little updates but the blog is great to show pictures and videos and expound on them. I started the blog when I took over as superintendent 18 months ago, thinking that I would be adding something to it every day. We have had a lot of changes and projects that have taken place in the last year and another very busy year ahead. But I am not so sure that golfers at the local muni, as a rule, care about what really goes on on a daily basis."

He's hoping to change that through increased use of social media and making customers aware of the information.

"I have had a lot of viewers from all over but getting them to sign on as a (Facebook) friend is not as easy as it sounds. I really wish that members and customers of golf courses everywhere would look at what is being put out there for them to read. I know it would help them understand better why we do the things we do."