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## THE ART OF STRATEGY

**S**teve Johnston, my colleague and the founder of Global Golf Advisors, says this about the importance of strategic planning: "The lack of a strategic plan may not be as dangerous as not having fire insurance, but it's certainly playing with fire." Evidently, based on the turnout last month for my first Golf Course Industry webinar, a number of people in our business agree. For anyone unfamiliar with strategic and business plans, here are five key points.

**1 A strategic plan is different from a business plan.** Strategic plans are owned by the board of directors. Boards manage strategy; management implements tactics. A strategic plan evaluates market conditions and the wants and needs of members and customers to determine the club's or the golf facility's overall direction. A good strategic plan is succinct and outlines clear and actionable goals and objectives. A business plan is developed by the management team specifically to guide implementation of the strategic plan.

**2 The strategic plan guides the business plan.** What does the club plan to do? The answer to that question forms the essence of the strategic plan. Goals and objectives should be actionable and measurable and stated in simple, declarative sentences. Set timeframes, milestones and measurements so management can tie actions, resources and schedules to the successful achievement of the goals.

**3 The business plan begins with the customer.** Every business – even non-profit clubs – has a customer. Most businesses have multiple audiences and segments. The best business plans thoroughly identify and

show a strong understanding of the customers the business targets. They gain this understanding from market research.

There are numerous resources to help club management develop the market analysis section of an effective business plan. I suggest starting with the National Golf Foundation ([ngf.org](http://ngf.org)) for a broad understanding of market trends. The NGF and PGA of

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America have built a solid base of data stemming from the PGA Performance-Trak platform ([pgalinks.com](http://pgalinks.com)). The Sports and Leisure Research Group ([sportsandleisureresearch.com](http://sportsandleisureresearch.com)) is informed and diligent in monitoring sports enthusiasts. You should occasionally check in with reliable futurists to keep a finger on the pulse of emerging trends that likely will trickle down to your club. Faith Popcorn ([faithpopcorn.com](http://faithpopcorn.com)) and Dr. William Frey ([frey-demographer.org](http://frey-demographer.org)) are respected macro trend spotters. Use the information and insights gained through the research process to tailor your programs, offerings and messages to these segments.

**4 The marketing plan is part of the business plan.**

Develop the marketing plan by engaging your target audience in a process of discovery. Regardless of age or social station, most people are eager for new experiences and new friends. Show that your club or facility offers both. People who are interested

in joining a club or being part of a golf or recreational lifestyle are most interested in the platform for socialization that is created at clubs. You should emphasize the social aspects and benefits of your club using social media and online communications vehicles, including Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.

Dedicate the time and resources needed to keep your online presence fresh and interesting. Online marketing is most effective when you're continuously driving traffic to your website with fresh and original content. Everyone wants to join a fun club with activities and parties. No one wants to join a club or visit a facility that is old, tired and inactive. Your website is the first clue prospective members have to the type of experience they'll have at your facility.

**5 Align market wants and needs to operational priorities and tactics.** Once thorough market research and careful marketing planning have been completed and reduced to key observations and critical action steps, align what the customer wants to what the club offers in programs and activities. Be efficient in telling the key audience segments about the club in terms of interest to each segment. Avoid jargon and clichés that emphasize the rules and history of the club. Those topics can sound dated and intimidating. Show the aspects of the club that are of interest to potentially incoming market segments.

What do people want at your club? Fun, friends, and fitness are proven essentials for attracting members and daily fee customers. A strategic plan backed up by a business plan is the first steps in helping them see that your facility is the destination they seek. **GCI**

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