DATA DUMP

I suspect that you, like many readers, may have heard me speak or attended a seminar I've done over the years. Since I know exactly bupkis about the science of turf management, I usually stick to non-agronomic topics like successful communications, using social media or, most commonly, "the state of the industry."

I've gotten to the point where I can do that speech in my sleep. Upon command, I could stand in front of a group of bored superintendents and recite it word-for-word with great authority. That is, until now. Here's my problem:

I have to blow the old speech up and write a brand new one.

In this issue of Golf Course Industry, you will find an explosion of new data about the golf market, how superintendents are managing budgets, how we're all using technology and much, much more. This is, to my knowledge, the largest benchmarking study of its kind ever conducted. I've seen other organizations and magazines report statistics based on 200 or 300 completed surveys but nothing close to the nearly 750 of y'all who took the time to fill out a pretty lengthy online survey form last month. It is definitely the most robust market study I've been involved with in 25 years.


Pat Jones
Editorial director and publisher

The cover story and the myriad charts, graphs and tables with it will give you a sense of proportion about the size of your operation compared to others. It is a new benchmark for you to use to measure what you're doing and how you're doing it vs. colleagues around the nation. It is also, most importantly, something GCI can replicate in future to take the temperature of the market and track trends.

That said, I have to admit we don't have a crack staff of social scientists and statisticians who do this stuff for us. We do it ourselves because we're pretty decent at it, we have the right technological tools at our disposal and – most notably – we're cheap. We'd rather throw money at other stuff like the staff planning retreat in Cancun than paying a gee-whiz research company to do it for us.

So, before anyone bets the farm on this data, consider the following:

This is NOT a perfect, scientifically validated study suitable for publishing in the Journal of Fancy-Schmancy Statistics. It is a poll. It reflects the answers of those who volunteered information to us. Right off the bat, you'll notice that about 40 percent of our responses came from private clubs even though truly private facilities only represent 25 percent of the market. Thus, I think the budget numbers reported are skewed high by some factor that we will try to determine in coming months.

Similarly, this was done online. We know for a fact that there are a group of you out there who are more digitally savvy and who tend to respond to surveys at a much higher rate than others. I suspect that folks out there struggling along trying to manage a 9-hole cornfield course do not have the same time or inclination to plug budget information into our survey software.

We think we asked the questions the right way and we shared them in advance with some smart superintendents out there who gave us input, but there are a zillion different ways that facilities slice their budgets. We believe that the sheer volume of responses helps to suppress the impact that a few off-target answers could have but, again, be advised that not everyone defines their "overhead costs" or "capital expenditures" the same way.

Now that you've been warned about the warts, let me tell you the beautiful part of this. It is an outstanding new resource for the entire industry to use and I'm proud of the way Mike Zawacki, our editor, conducted it. He made this happen while also juggling production and doing a million other things. Attaboy, Mike.

I'm also proud of the incentive we used to drive that unprecedented response. Instead of offering a longshot chance to win an iPad or a gift card, we decided to donate cash to our friends at the Wee One Foundation to support their mission of helping superintendents and assistants in times of need. And, thanks to all of you who responded, we'll be handing them a check for $2,500 soon.

In the long run, data and statistics are nice, but the amazing work that Wee One does in the memory of my old friend Wayne Otto is the best commentary on the state of our industry I can ever imagine. **GCI**

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