



Henry DeLozier, a principal in the Global Golf Advisors consultancy. DeLozier joined Global Golf Advisors in 2008 after nine years as the vice president of golf of Pulte Homes. He is a past president of the National Golf Course Owners Association's board of directors and serves on the PGA of America's Employers Advisory Council.

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

There's nothing like a new year to regroup mentally, take a fresh look at how you've been doing things and consider new approaches. As 2013 gets underway, here are three suggestions.

HIT THE RESTART BUTTON. Many clubs have become stale and set in their ways. They use words like "tradition" and "time-honored" as code for "We're satisfied with being 20 years behind the curve." They haven't introduced a new program or major initiative since the Carter administration. Consider the following to invigorate your club and get ahead of competitors.

- **Use market data and information.** Identify social trends and patterns that are changing the preferences and priorities of prospective members. Women significantly influence membership choices; understand what they want. Don't rely on outdated assumptions.

- **Find ways to differentiate.** In a sea of sameness, the clubs, courses and facilities that stand out in favorable ways will be the most attractive and successful.

- **Return to zero-based budgeting.** Don't rely on prior-year statistics as a basis for budgeting. Do the required homework to collect past history and develop well-founded assumptions. The right information will liberate new and better ideas.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS. Many facilities and club leaders have discovered during tough times that they don't know their customers and prospects as well as they should.

Market analysis at most clubs – if it is available at all – is anecdotal and incomplete. The paucity of thorough and deliberate market research is at the heart of the new membership struggle. How can you remedy that deficiency?

- **Mine membership and marketing committees for information.** Lead generation is obviously important, but clubs must abandon the historic practice of asking, "Who knows someone who might join the club?" New market conditions require thoughtful research and deliberate recruitment planning.

- **Collect and thoroughly analyze local market data and competitive information.** Most clubs lack useful market analysis to drive tactical decision-making. Study the clubs with which you compete; understand where and how they are better or more attractive than your own club. Understand your strengths and use them as a competitive advantage. Be honest about

weaknesses and develop a plan to minimize them.

- **Use market information to plan communications.** Focus on differentiating elements of the club. Collect, analyze and then act – deliberately, not blindly – on the best available market information.

- **Maintain a current database of member referrals.** The best source of new members is a club's current membership. Engage members in a continuous recruitment program and process. "Best Friend" programs encourage current members to recruit friends and business associates.

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PLAN STRATEGICALLY. With no destination, one road is as good as the next. There is emerging proof that clubs actively using the corporate discipline of strategic planning are separating from the pack of competitors.

Most markets are significantly oversupplied, meaning there will be winners and losers in each. Deliberate planning is a competitive game-changer for the clubs that are best prepared.

The most critical components of the strategic plan for a golf course facility are:

- **Strategic Vision.** How does the club view itself and how does it want to be viewed by members and its community? There should be broad – if not unanimous – agreement on this aspirational vision.

- **Goals and Objectives.** What does the club want to accomplish and what is the deadline for each goal and objective? The goals and objectives should be simply stated and easy to understand. This is the club's covenant with its members and stakeholders.

The strategic plan at your golf course facility must be supported by a comprehensive business plan. The business plan is tactical in nature and describes the actions that will help the facility achieve its goals and objectives and, in doing so, fulfill its long-term strategic vision.

Here's hoping that 2013 is a great year for everyone in the golf business. Now's the perfect time to refresh your strategic thinking, gain a better understanding of your customers and put the plans in place to increase our odds. **GCI**