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RUT BUSTERS

Nine tips to kick start your facility's performance.

Is your club stuck in a rut? Do you find yourself entering the new year preparing to face the same challenges with the same strategies and programs? If so, you may be feeling less than inspired, a condition easily spread to team members. It's not too late to put an actionable plan in place that will make 2014 the year you emerged from the proverbial rut. Here are tips to kick start performance.

Talk to your members or regular customers. Most club members and regular customers at daily fee courses have an opinion about your operation. You want to know what that is,

input and opinion from customers and prospects. So should you. Ask questions about hours of operation, mowing practices, greens speed, soap in the locker room and lunch. Your members are a treasure-trove of knowledge and wisdom. Tap into it.

Highly effective focus groups include six to eight people who will talk with you for 60 to 75 minutes. Listen and let the group talk. There is no requirement for explanations or grand pronouncements. Just listen carefully and ask questions to understand fully the real intent of the comments. Consider an inexpensive form of compensation for their time

learn how they answer the phone. Ask them about your club and learn how they view you as a competitor.

MAKE IT EASY AND FUN TO USE YOUR CLUB. Most clubs have silly rules because they've always had the same silly rules. Stop defaulting to history. Your members – and especially their teenage children – can identify the outdated rules that need to go.

1. Eliminate outdated practices that make it difficult or frustrating to be your guest. Philosophers sometimes ask "Why?" five times. Why? Because simplicity is easy to explain and understand. Complicated and arcane ideas require excessive explanation. Busy people don't join clubs to add complication and stress to their lives, so don't allow an outdated rule to undermine your efforts.

2. Ask members, "When will we see you next?" For some reason, many clubs never think to ask a guest to return. So they don't. Make sure that your members and their guests or the customers at your daily fee course know that you're eager to see them again. Repeat patronage is the ultimate prize. Win it!

3. Reward loyalty with recognition and real value. Introduce programs that make being a "regular" very beneficial to the recipient. Eschew up-front price discounts for continuous engagement. That is the approach that is working well for the airline, hospitality and retail giants. Recruit, retain and build the loyalty of great members and customers.

IMPROVE YOUR PERFORMANCE. With so many choices in an over-supplied

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so you can do more of the things they like. So, ask them what they think, even if you think their answers might sting a little. There's no better way to learn what matters most and discover where you are wasting money.

1. Use every medium available, from one-on-one interviews and focus groups with members to member surveys to regular social media polling. Make it personal and demonstrate that you intend to be held accountable to their suggestions for improvement. Make sure you include a cross section of membership, and don't overlook your women members, who not only are the decision makers in most families, but also are remarkably observant about club conditions.

2. Gather your own focus groups. Top companies constantly solicit

to encourage a sincere and thoughtful engagement.

3. Be your own "Secret Shopper." When we make calls to our own club, we learn how the club is being presented to members and prospects. That starts with the voice and personality of the person answering the phone and carries over to anyone who might have a member-facing role. Remember, there's no second chance for a first impression.

BUT DON'T STOP THERE. Call realtors in your market area and ask what they know about your club. They talk to people all day every day. Ask the service station attendant down the street for directions to your club. Ask local bankers what they think about your club. Call your competitors and

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COMPANY	WEBSITE	PAGE
Aqua Aid	www.aquaaid.com	11
BASF	www.betterturf.basf.us	53
Billy Goat Industries	www.billygoat.com	26
Club Car	www.ClubCar.com	2-3
Cushman	www.cushman.com	25
Direct Solutions	www.aatdirectsolutions.com	16-17*
FMC	www.fmcprosolutions.com	belly
Foley United	www.foleyunited.com	31
Grigg Bros.	www.griggbros.com	47
Jacobsen	www.jacobsen.com	60
John Deere	www.JohnDeere.com/Golf	14-15
Neptune's Harvest	www.neptunesharvest.com	37
PBI/Gordon Corp.	www.gordonsprofessional.com	21
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Weed Man	www.weedmanfranchise.com	37

*denotes regional advertising

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market, the winners are the clubs that consistently perform at the highest level. Think of these three actions that can be launched immediately and with very little added expense:

1. Elevate course conditions. No one wants to play a course in poor condition. The golf course must be in great shape. There is no forgiveness for dead grass, weeds, mud-holes and unfinished projects.

2. Clean up! Thoroughly clean the clubhouse and keep it clean. Malcolm Gladwell points out in *The Tipping Point*, his best-selling book about trends

of change, that the first step in reducing crime in New York City was eliminating graffiti and broken windows. This simple step reinforces brand standards, admirable personal and professional habits and the sense of well-being for members, guests and employees.

3. Engage your staff. Ask the staff for ideas that will add to members' enjoyment and the operational efficiency of your club. Remember, everyone wants to play for the winning team and great ideas are hiding inside of every employee.

A few simple steps can make 2014 the year we get out of our ruts. **GCI**

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