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BETTER TO BE SMART THAN LUCKY

Capitalizing on the top factors influencing golf development and operation.

Golf is experiencing dramatic change as the economy recovers and as people attracted to the game revise their list of wants and needs. While the changes create anxiety, the alert and savvy see opportunities to seize the moment.

Remember the question Dirty Harry Callahan posed, "Do you feel lucky today?" You should feel lucky because the three primary factors influencing golf development and operation are easy to recognize.

HOUSING'S EBB AND FLOW. The expansion and contraction of the housing industry largely influences the macro-economic characteristics of golf. Almost all top 100 metropolitan statistical areas are over-supplied with golf courses and country clubs. Like Harry Potter's Sorting Hat, the end-game for most golf businesses hinges on the choices they make. Wise choices will yield satisfying results; poor choices will leave you in Slytherin House with the Dark Wizards.

The National Association of Homebuilders forecasts favorable growth patterns from the housing sector, which accounts for 17 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. Based on population growth, the NAHB estimates that 17 million additional new homes will be built over next decade.

Golf will prosper in markets with steady growth prospects. Phoenix, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco and parts of greater Los Angeles will have a good run in the West. Dallas, Houston and San Antonio will continue their favorable trends in the Southwest. In Florida, Naples and Vero Beach on the east coast and Ocala and Tampa on the west are growth markets. Golf also will grow

where there's a convergence of state capitals and state universities. Austin, Texas; Lincoln, Neb.; and Madison, Wis. are examples of places where stable local economies are fueled by steady employment statistics.

WOMEN HOLD THE PURSE STRINGS. The second change involves customers. In the past, courses and most country clubs benefitted from a work culture driven mostly by men who received club memberships as an employment perk. Now, women are the primary customers. In her book "Marketing to Women," Martha Barletta notes that 91 percent of home-purchase decisions – which often dictate school

lifestyle. Lifestyle speaks to wellness, inclusivity, safety and security. Golf has long sought to define itself in terms of exclusivity and tradition.

Consider the lifestyle at your facility. Does it welcome children, women and families? Do you emphasize responsible environmental stewardship? Does the staff – from the GM down through the ranks – demonstrate that they offer a safe haven for children and families? Is the junior program – for all sports and interests – integrated into the club's overall activity plan?

BENEFITING FROM CURRENT TRENDS. Here are three tactics to help you tap

“ Understanding change helps golf business leaders anticipate and plan next steps.”

districts and club memberships – are made by a woman.

If you're selling memberships, golf leagues, weddings and special events, your customer is a woman. As more women take their places on club and corporate boards, the influence of women on golf will grow steadily.

Golfers seek fun and friendship in their memberships. They want fitness and fresh air, too. Women also want to see their families accommodated. Therefore, focus on communicating and consistently supporting the needs and values of the changing customer base. Those who do will grow stronger and increase their capture of wallet and market share.

LIFESTYLE IS A BAROMETER OF SUCCESS. Finally, the term to describe what people want from golf is

into the changing marketplace.

- Make the course interesting and fresh in the eyes of golfers. Maximize their engagement by conducting focus groups and town hall discussions to determine what improvements and changes will be most beneficial.

- Integrate interesting and engaging short courses within the existing course to signal your commitment to children and families. Invest in the equipment, scorecards and tee markers to demonstrate a commitment to these critical audience segments.

- Update the practice area with short game target greens for pitching and chipping. People with extra time on their hands can practice with or without friends. Short-game practice is popular with more than 60 percent of the respondents to the latest Del Webb survey of baby boomers. **GCI**