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## THE TROUBLE WITH FOMOs

Please allow me to introduce you to Greg Nathan of the National Golf Foundation and his “Mayor of Crazytown” blog.

His blog name tells you a bit about Greg. He’s NGF’s guy in the market. Speaks a lot at events, gets out in the field and meets a lot of golf business leaders. Typical schmoozer... and good at it. But, he’s also a bit of a rarity among association folks because he seems hell-bent on speaking his mind. I’m not saying association people aren’t honest... I’m just saying most are practiced diplomats who are masters at suggesting things without taking a position. Greg apparently has no such qualms. I like it.

Greg recently wrote a blog post that nails a serious problem: the sharp drop in players in the 18-34 demographics. You know... the people who are supposed to be keeping your place going a decade from now.

*“You may have heard or read that the next generation of golfers... has been ‘voting’ definitively against the traditional game with their feet, as they say. They’re just not showing up at golf courses the way they used to. Golf participation among this age group has declined 30% during the past twenty years. Since the 18-34 age segment historically has the highest participation rate and is also the age range when most people take up the game for the first time, this decline has profound implications for golf’s future.”*

Are your alarm bells ringing? Why are we losing this core customer group?

*“The referendum on recreational golf (not to be confused with interest in pro golf) among younger people is so negative because we continue, as an industry, to expect/force them to put aside their regular lifestyle for 4-5 hours. Aren’t businesses and industries supposed to*

*evolve and innovate to better serve their customers’ needs/wants? If we do not change (and fast!), the game and business of golf will absolutely guarantee its own ‘right-sizing’ in the not-so-distant future.”*

Yikes! And then he poses a critical question that forces us to consider our slavish devotion to “tradition” versus the compelling need to evolve:

*“What makes golf so special that we can maintain the arrogant position that it’s the customers who need to alter their behavior in order for us to allow them to consume our product!?”*

Ouch. The truth hurts, doesn’t it? Here, Nathan says, is the problem:

*“Golf is simply not relevant for the perpetually engaged, never-out-of-touch ‘Millennials’ of whom I write. The concept called ‘FOMO’ (Fear Of Missing Out) is a huge driver of their behavior. After all, they sleep with their phones! Hey, wait a second... I sleep with my phone and I’m 44! Think of the golf course as FOMO-central – the place where they are virtually guaranteed to be missing out on everything in their life! Doesn’t that sound awesome? I can hear the echoes of a generation of 28-year-olds now: ‘Golf? Are you kidding me? No chance.’ We might as well be fertilizing the fairways with kryptonite, folks!”*

And here’s where Greg gets really crazy; he actually suggests a solution:

*“My crystal ball says that the most critical way that golf must innovate is by encouraging and facilitating, not simply allowing (yes, there’s a BIG difference), entertainment in the golf car. The new line item in the capital improvement budget at most golf courses (should) be video monitors and connectivity in all of their (golf cars). If you need to make your course a 150-acre Wi-Fi zone, then so be it. If every car in your fleet needs to be a mobile Internet hot spot, then get on it. Full broadcast media in every*

*buggy... absolutely. Bluetooth-enabled speakers in the back of every car... check!”*

Okay, I’m not sure I agree 100 percent with the Mayor of Crazytown on that, but he makes an excellent point. We accommodate people with disabilities. We accommodate kids and ladies. Why not accommodate the wired customer? I’m 51 years old and I must confess that I’ve live-streamed the Masters broadcast onto my iPad in my cart during the middle of a round at a nice club. It seemed wrong to do it. Why should I feel guilty for doing something normal while I’m playing golf?

*“If the next generation of players were going to be attracted to the golf product that course owners and operators have been serving up... they’d already be playing. They’re not. Even if it was free, I’m not sure they’d be teeing it up. I think traditional golf is the most perfect game ever created... but our customer prospects under 35 absolutely do not agree. Unless you run one of those 25% of facilities (and I think that’s generous) that can do good business offering only the traditional game... it’s wake up time!”*

The Mayor is absolutely right. Instead of bemoaning the problem, offer a solution. Success in today’s crowded, weird market is often dependent on finding the right niche and exploiting it ruthlessly. Why not cater to the iGeneration?

I’ll let Mr. Nathan have the final word:

*“Make your course a FOMO-free zone and help start the golf revolution that might just be the secret to keeping our game and business strong.”*

(Greg Nathan’s blog can be found at <http://ngfdashboard.clubnews-maker.org/Newsletter/1rf655upc2m118g6mneb41>.) GCI