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Jack Brennan founded Paladin Golf Marketing in Plant City, Fla., to assist golf course owners and managers with successful marketing. He can be reached at jackbrennan@tampabay.rr.com.

FOCUS YOUR SALES EFFORTS

When prioritizing your goals while creating a marketing plan, focus your time and energy on soliciting business segments that will generate the most revenue.

A good marketing plan is dynamic, so if you're monitoring it properly, it will change as the year progresses; and each subsequent year, you identify the most profitable marketing targets better. A good marketing plan requires realistic goals and market research, but even with solid research and preparation, a plan can go wrong if it's not monitored closely.

Paladin Golf Marketing conducted a marketing assessment report for Baywood Tree Golf Club (actual name withheld for contractual reasons) in November 2006. The report was a researched assessment of future public, member and expected play levels in a market with a priority placed on direct competitors. The purpose was to assess market demand for golf in all segments of area play: outside, membership, group business, hotel, seniors, etc. Once this market research is compiled, it can be used to assess market success levels at a course. If done correctly, it's all the market research needed to begin concerted marketing strategies and tactics for a public-access golf course.

Baywood Tree's owner wanted marketing assistance on an affordable, step-by-step basis. The course didn't have much cash flow, and the owner was contributing more than \$65,000 a year to the operation for the past several years. Although the owner had means, he wanted to begin with the marketing assessment report to determine if his course had the chance to succeed in the market or decide on a more viable use of the land.

First, we completed a demand analysis based on population demographics. On average, each 18-hole equivalent was projected to generate 7,000 more rounds than Baywood Tree was generating. Not good news for Baywood but promising for the future.

Next, we completed an Internet golf

course survey of all public and semiprivate courses in a 40-minute radius. Then we conducted a telephone survey of the same courses. Afterwards, we conducted in-person surveys to confirm the telephone survey information.

From our surveys and other sources, we reviewed facility-reported demand compared to consumer- or population-reported demand. Interestingly, the facilities were reporting almost 23 percent more rounds than the population method of demand analysis. The likely sources were golfers coming into the market from outside the radius used for analysis and tourism/visitors. After we confirmed the tourism pressure through the hospitality industry, the rounds opportunities would be duly noted and included in our marketing assessment recommendations with strategies to outmarket the competition for this business.

To assist our research, we needed direct feedback from customers and area golfers. Normally, we recommend a player survey – 12 questions distributed at the course for 10 consecutive days each quarter – but the course was in its off-season generating few rounds. We decided to conduct an e-survey and contracted with an e-marketing company for the opt-in e-mail addresses of golfers only.

One of the greatest benefits of the e-survey, besides the response information, is the quick turnaround time. Within 10 days, we were set to mail. With an incentive included, we experienced a 14.5-percent open rate on our e-mail blast, and 10.9-percent of those opens filled out the survey. It's not the greatest return ratio, but we had 126 completed surveys and were able to use the respondents' likes, dislikes and comments about the course and other favorite course information as a snapshot of how our subject course is perceived in its marketplace.

Think about the value of the research we have at this point and how it benefits our decision making while planning the marketing. We have the owners', long-time manag-

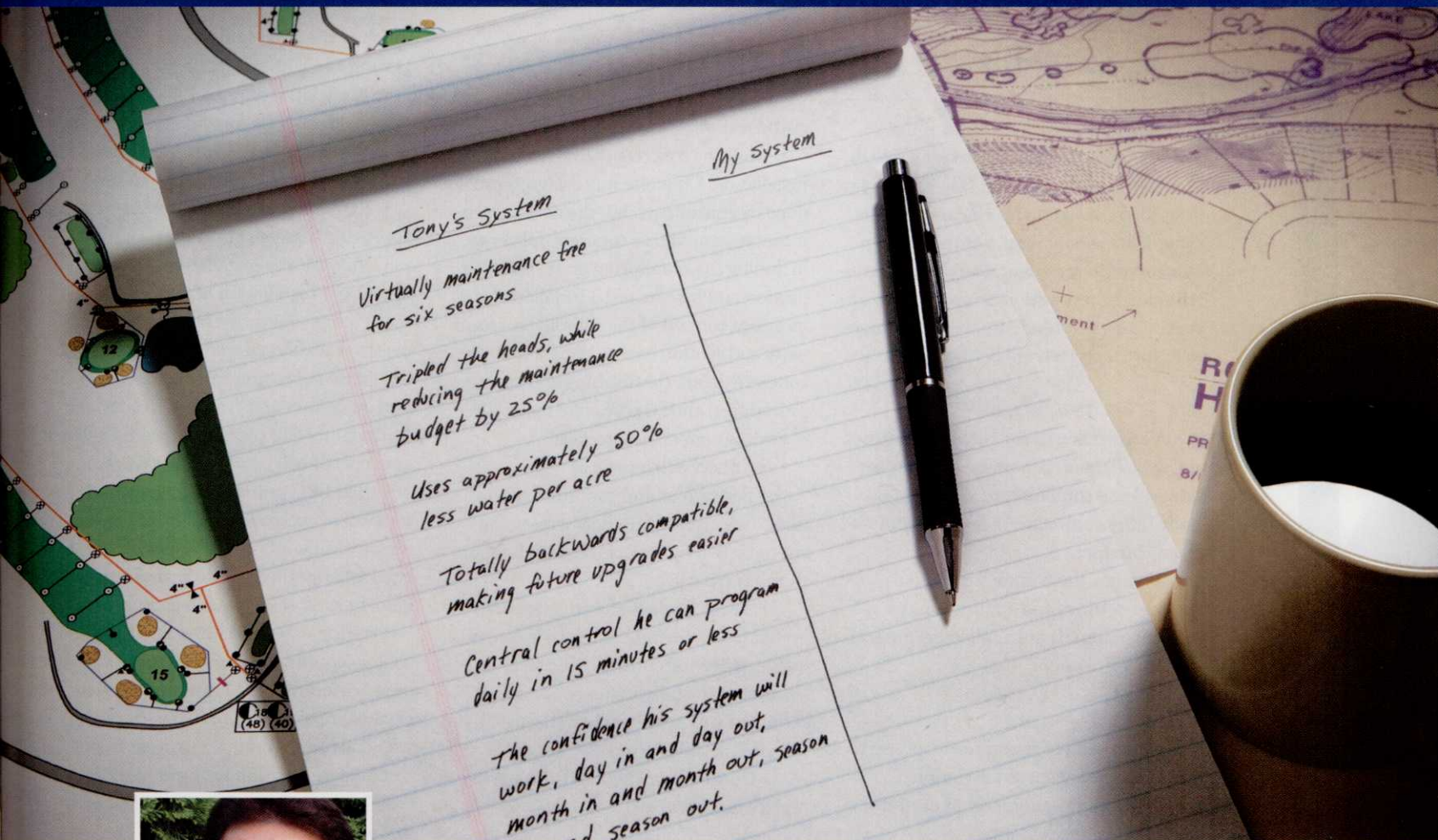
ers', sales managers', employees' and several loyal golfers' perceptions of Baywood Tree's strengths and weaknesses. We have industry statistics to gauge what demand levels could be expected at the course. We have a history of rounds and revenue the course has generated the past several years. We have a good but general idea of what segments are playing at all of the course's direct competitors through our Internet, telephone and in-person surveys. And we have direct feedback from our e-survey of area golfers. That's powerful research on which to base marketing.

Baywood Tree's owner is a busy medical specialist and doesn't have time to focus on the club as much as he would prefer. He bought the property, including the golf course, in 1979, and the club took care of itself through the mid-1990s. However, he didn't have any golf-industry experience, and his management team learned by the seats of their pants during golf's better times. Beginning with fiscal year 2002, the course began experiencing losses, which continued to mount primarily because of oversupply on the peripheral of his primary market and some neglect of the facility's clubhouse and food-and-beverage operation. Still, the golf course is in good condition and competitive relative to the market.

A marketing assessment report isn't intended as a marketing plan. It's the foundation on which to build a marketing plan. The problem that occurred a few months after the marketing assessment report was submitted and reviewed was it was left in the hands of the management team without proper monitoring mechanisms in place. It only took an hour-and-a-half phone conversation to realize the salesperson had gravitated to sales targets she was most comfortable with. They weren't the targets that could generate the most revenue.

The problem in Baywood Tree's case was prime selling time wasn't optimized by relying on the judgment of a salesperson versus a marketing planner. Know your business priorities, focus on them appropriately, and monitor your efforts in a systematic way. That's priority marketing. **GCI**

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The confidence his system will
work, day in and day out,
month in and month out, season
and season out.

My System



Tony Girardi, Certified Golf Course Superintendent (CGCS), Rockrimmon Country Club, Stamford, CT

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Jeffrey D. Brauer is a licensed golf course architect and president of GolfScapes, a golf course design firm in Arlington, Texas. Brauer, a past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, can be reached at jeff@jeffreybrauer.com.

CONSTRUCTION ROLE – PART III

In the first two installments of this series about a superintendent's role in construction (May and July issues), I described contractual boundaries superintendents should work within if acting as an owner's representative during a construction or renovation project. Below are specifics superintendents should evaluate to ensure a project will be successful.

TURF, FERTILIZERS, AMENDMENTS

- Verify material for correct quantities and specification compliance, including slow-release components, if any, especially if the contractor is supplying an "or equal" product.
- Monitor the contractor's initial spreader settings and applications to confirm materials are applied evenly and at correct the rate.

TURF AND SOD

- Count seed bags and read tags, certification papers, etc., as necessary.
- Measure the cubic feet of each truckload to verify the quantity.
- Visit proposed sod farms to select sod for the project.
- Mark installation limits and direct initial watering.

GREENS MIX AND GRAVEL

- Design or review mix design. Recommend changes within the contract price or through a change order.
- Observe and accept mix and gravel deliveries. Reject those that don't comply but provide a specific reason for rejection.
- Monitor or provide ongoing mix testing against prototype samples.

CART PATH

- Assist with cart-path layout, bridge requirements (weight, width, etc.) and

curb location.

- Monitor concrete deliveries and installation. Concrete mix design is usually done by consultants, but the owner's representative monitors concrete deliveries, including the monitoring of: (i) base compaction and base material installation; (ii) moisture content of the subsoil; (iii) form work and reinforcement installation; (iv) concrete depth; (v) finishing and curing procedures; and (vi) concrete materials.

For the concrete materials:

- Collect delivery tags.
- Perform and/or monitor "slump tests," which measure how watery the concrete is. With concrete, 4- to 5-inch slump is typical.
- About 30 days after the installation, evaluate the concrete strength by providing or reviewing core cylinder tests after placement to confirm the concrete has sufficient compressive strength (usually specified at 3,000 to 4,000 psi).
- Check for cracks and the need to replace certain areas.

DRAINAGE

This is as important an element of construction as there is, and one you'll fight forever about, if not done correctly. So, this merits considerable effort to identify drainage-problem areas for correction by grading or pipe additions – including the cart paths, tees and fringe areas after every rain storm – and monitor pipe installation, including: proper line and grade; minimum grade for self-cleansing velocity; and catch basins, including grading around them to assure water enters.

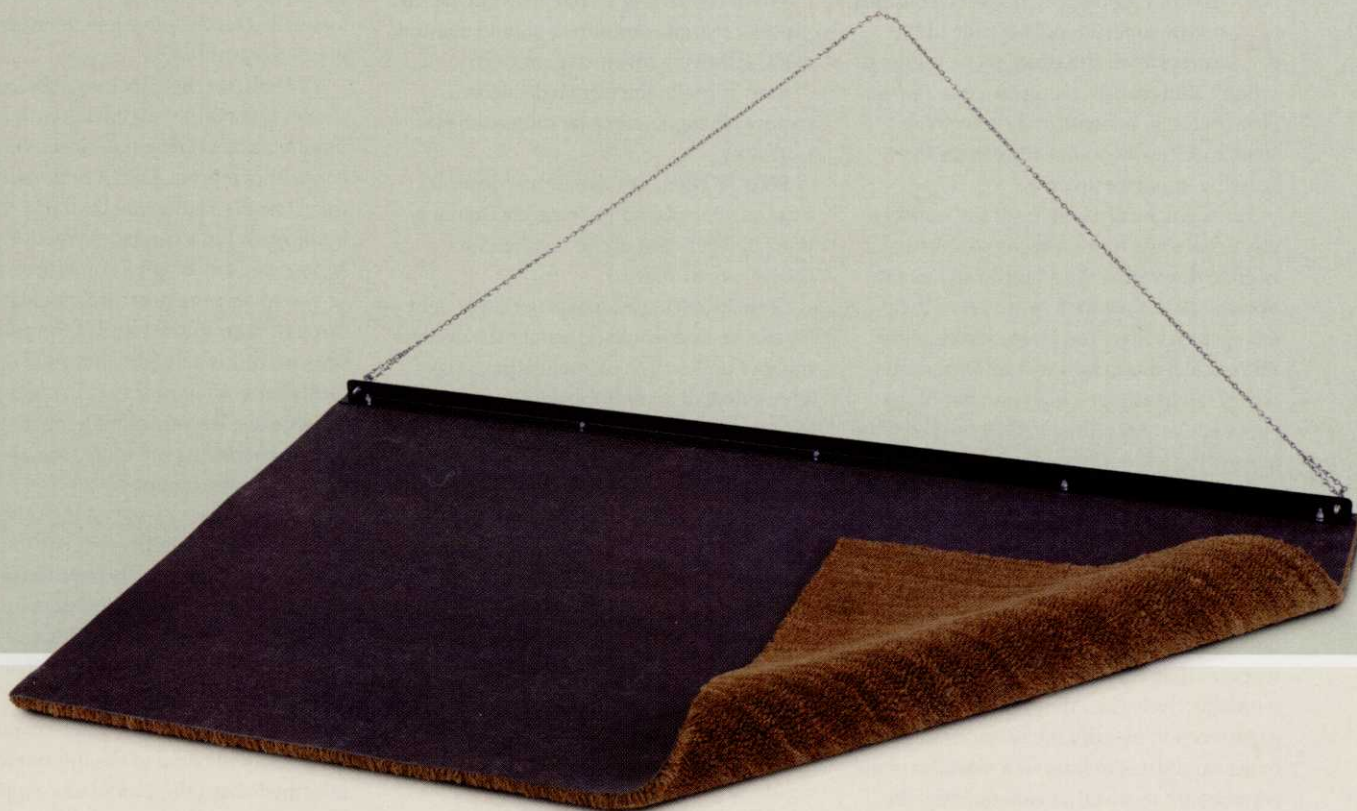
IRRIGATION

The heartbeat of the golf course – and an area that's prone to installation problems – is the irrigation system, which requires

much of the superintendent's attention. During a recent project, irrigation consultant Terry Little of Aqua Engineering in Fort Collins, Colo., provided the superintendent with this checklist of things to do or monitor:

- Participate in staking out the system, approving it as you go; and
 - Monitor the installation, observing the proper installation of:
 - Piping – (i) thrust blocks; (ii) pipe depths, backfill material and routing within manufacturer's maximum deflection guidelines and "snaked" to allow for contraction; (iii) pipe ends tapered before assembly of bell connections; (iv) properly used PVC primer and cement and removal of excess material from pipes; (v) mechanical joints properly aligned, tightened and installed within manufacturer's guidelines; and (vi) trench compaction.
 - Wiring – 24- and 120-volt wiring and cables should be located: (i) below the pipe centerlines; (ii) loosely to allow for expansion/contraction; (iii) with expansion coils at directional changes; (iv) in a consistent location for future locating ease; and (v) wire splices should be minimal and logically located.
 - Sprinklers – set level and swing-joints should be set at 30 to 45 degree angles, not flat on the bottom of the ditch or vertical, and with proper lay length to achieve the correct angle.
 - Pump house – Other than the wet well and pump skid, these are often provided by the owner. So, as the owner's representative, you might take the lead to provide: (i) power to the pumps, meters and transformers; (ii) design criteria and/or review, including leaving room for future needs; (iii) arranging building inspections; and (iv) verifying wet-well depths.
- Also, you might encourage good work habits, such as daily clean up, safety programs, meeting any regulations or permit conditions affecting the project. **GC**

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Jim McLoughlin is the founder of TMG Golf (www.TMGgolfcounsel.com), a golf course development and consulting firm, and is a former executive director of the GCSAA. He can be reached at golfguide@adelphia.net or 760-804-7339. His previous columns can be found on www.golfcourseindustry.com.

SEARCH GOES ELECTRONIC

After having dedicated several columns to the superintendents' side of the career Web-site issue, I'd be remiss if I didn't address the complementary impact electronics, in general, and career Web sites, specifically, soon will have on the search-committee process.

However, before looking at the impact electronics will have, search committees need to determine the quantity and quality of candidates they wish to attract to their job openings first. Too often, search committees feel their clubs will be dishonored if they fail to attract a high number of job applications. Accordingly, they tend to write all-inviting job notices hoping to catch the eye of every level of experienced candidate. The problems with this approach are twofold: first and foremost, upper echelon candidates don't respond to "cattle call" invitations to apply for job openings, and second, this is a guaranteed way to attract more resumes than the search committee can deal with effectively (i.e., they don't have the experience to identify the better four, five or six candidates to interview when so many resumes are received). Consequently, the better candidates often aren't considered.

If ever there was a solid example of less delivering more, it's when a golf facility understands it will fair better attracting as few as 25 quality applications than 90 to more than 125 applications from mostly less experienced candidates. To do this, the club/course should:

Write a tight job notice that will encourage the better candidates to apply because of the challenge the job opportunity presents, while at the same time dissuading the lesser-experienced candidates from applying; and

Directly invite several well-qualified candidates to apply. The best way to identify well-qualified candidates is through regional/state golf association staffs because they interface with virtually every superintendent within a region from one year to the next.

When converting to an electronic-based process, search committees should commit to the following seven-step process:

Step 1: Make the formal decision to require all applications be submitted electronically.

Step 2: Then, immediately register for a unique domain name to receive applications independent of the regular club/course e-mail address.

Step 3: Circulate an appropriately tight job notice that would (i) attract the desired number and quality of applications; (ii) advise that all applications must be submitted electronically to the e-mail address indicated by a specific deadline date; and (iii) advise that applicants who incorporate personal career Web sites within their applications will be given priority (not exclusive) attention. (This approach will encourage the better candidates to apply.)

Too often, search committees feel their clubs will be dishonored if they fail to attract a high number of job applications.

Step 4: Forward applications electronically, as received, to each search committee member for review well before interviews. This will avoid building the dreaded tall pile of hard copy applications that are generally read at one time only after the closing deadline passes – an approach that discourages all candidates because it's so easy for the better applications to get lost in the shuffle.

Step 5: Once the closing date passes, delay the traditional approach of immediately selecting candidates for interview and invite about a dozen of the better qualifying candidates to submit time-sequenced, budget-

supported plans of action electronically to the search committee by a specific date (about 10 days before interviews begin). Upon receipt, the plans of action would be forwarded electronically to members of the search committee.

To facilitate this process, clubs/courses should (i) provide candidates with information packets (recent budgets, course consulting reports, OSHA records, etc.) they'll need to complete their due diligence homework and to prepare effective plans of action; and (ii) assign a committee member or two to personally escort candidates through their initial tours of the golf course because this is a unique, informal opportunity for both parties to gain comfortable insights of each other that generally aren't obtainable during the more formal traditional interview process.

Step 6: After a review of the submitted plans of action, identify the four to six candidates the committee believes have earned the privilege to be interviewed because of the quality of their applications and the merits of their submitted plans of action.

The benefits that accrue here are precedent setting. First, search committee members will come to the interviews well informed about the candidates' employment history and their anticipated approach to the job, if hired. Then, the pressure will be taken off the candidates to hard-sell themselves cold turkey during the brief interview minutes. These two elements taken in combination virtually assure a more relaxed, in depth and informative Q&A exchange that significantly enhances the likelihood of hiring the best candidate available.

Step 7: Finalize the selection process and move on.

Without question, just as term papers and the like are submitted electronically throughout the academic world, assistants and superintendents should get their mind sets and Web sites ready to compete for jobs within this constantly evolving electronic world as soon as possible because there will be little other choice in two to three years. Electronic communications is a search-committee party waiting to happen. **GC**

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Robert A. Milligan, Ph.D., is professor emeritus from Cornell University and senior consultant with Madison, Wis.-based Dairy Strategies. He can be reached at 651-647-0495 or rmilligan@trsmith.com.

ENSURING A FULFILLING FUTURE

What will you do differently next year? What will you be doing in 10 or 20 years? What will you be able to do in retirement?

I've worked closely with golf course superintendents for almost 20 years, and during that time, I've gained great respect for what you do and how you do it. I've also learned there are some unique opportunities and threats for you.

One opportunity is the myriad educational materials and seminars offered by the GCSAA, universities, state and regional member organizations, and the many companies selling products and services. These opportunities are unparalleled in other industries, so you should be proud of your market.

These opportunities are also a threat – that you won't use them effectively, and thus, find yourself unprepared for the next 10 to 20 years or even for retirement. The threat is real. I've talked to many superintendents who seek advancement or a career change but don't have the necessary knowledge, skills and experiences to move into upper-level management or other rewarding positions.

Other unique aspects of a superintendent's position make this threat more real. First, many superintendents don't have a supervisor or mentor to guide them with their career development because many clubs don't have a traditional organizational structure. Second, there are many superintendents who don't have an obvious next step in their career, which also is influenced by the lack of structure at a club.

I hope you're asking, "What does this mean for me?" It means you must be thoughtful and proactive about your educational choices. If you're like most superintendents, when you get the course roster for the GCSAA conference at the Golf Industry Show or a regional event, you look at the offerings and select a few to attend. Although these selections will be

beneficial, they'll likely focus primarily or exclusively on your short-term needs, and the lost opportunity will contribute to the aforementioned threat.

You're in charge of your professional development. As a correlation, you'd never think of applying fertilizer or pesticides without a plan. Similarly, you should never decide what offerings to take based only on what you see today. The offering selection should be based on a carefully thought out, professional development plan.

A superintendent in one of my seminars told me he takes two seminars each year at the Golf Industry Show – one for his course and one for himself. The seminar for the course focused on what he'll do differently next year. The seminar for him focused on what he'll be doing during the next 10 to 20 years and, perhaps, in retirement. He had a plan. Below is a three-step process for you to develop a plan.

Step 1

Think about and visit with family, mentors, friends and acquaintances in other roles and even industries to discuss what you want to do and accomplish with the remainder of your career. Consider these questions:

- Do I want to continue in my current or similar position until I retire?
- Am I driven to strive to be a superintendent at a prestigious course?
- Do I want to advance

to a position such as director of golf covering multiple courses or leading all of the services of a facility?

- Am I interested in a different position within the golf business, such as a position in the many companies that provide goods and services to superintendents and golf courses?
- Am I interested in a career change to another industry or occupation?

Outline or write your observations and conclusions.

Step 2

Determine the knowledge, skills and experiences you'll need to excel in what you seek to accomplish during the rest of your career. This won't be easy and will require research and conversations with people in positions you seek. Be proactive and talk to individuals in these positions. You'll be surprised how willing people are to talk to you.

Step 3

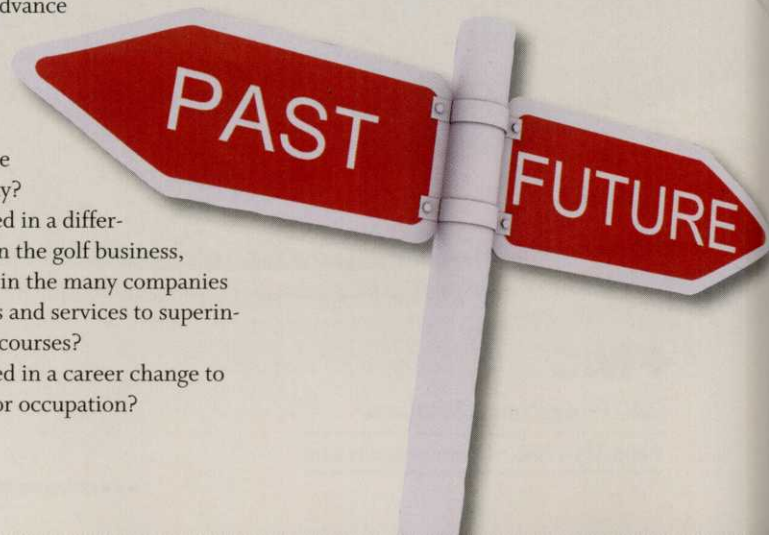
You're now ready to lay out your professional development plan. The following should help:

1. Focus on topics beyond the normal turf management courses – leadership, sales training, supervision, strategic planning, team building, interpersonal skills, customer orientation and marketing.

2. Move outside your comfort zone. Your training could move outside offerings specifically for superintendents. Look to local chambers of commerce, colleges or universities, or executive educational programs.

3. Don't restrict yourself to traditional courses and seminars. The Internet offers almost unlimited opportunities for learning.

Armed with your professional improvement plan, your seminar selections for the GCSAA conference at the Golf Industry Show and other educational events will be thoughtful, proactive and planned. **GCI**





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Alternative product research

The USGA is conducting research projects about the effectiveness of new and alternative products for golf course construction, including testing bunker sand, bunker liners and sand erosion products, according to Jim Moore, director of construction education for the USGA Green Section. Here's what he had to say about some of them:

1. Flat pipe in green construction. "It's another option that works. It's cost effective and practical, but you need to use fittings that are designed for the flat pipe."
2. Alternatives to gravel, such as plastic or geotextiles. "Geotextiles were never accepted by the USGA. I think they're acceptable, but I need to convince others in the USGA in order to put them in the USGA guidelines."
3. Alternative seeding processes. "For example, BlueYellow's product is difficult to apply because it's lightweight. It's like spreading Kleenex on the ground."
4. Inline filters for drainage. "We need to be more prudent with grow-ins. We're putting down too much nitrogen, and it's running into bodies of water. We need to filter the water as it comes through a green. These filters won't be installed on every green, rather in certain environmentally sensitive areas."
5. Wireless sensors in greens. "These will help the superintendent know if there's a perched water table."
6. Subsurface drip irrigation. "This will most likely take off in tees. You need water to move upward so you should use dirty sand with silt and clay because with 100-percent sand, water will drain more quickly."

How are we doing?

The growth or health of the industry is measured in several ways. Two of those are rounds played and golf course construction. The charts below provide a glimpse of each. Overall, growth remains fairly stagnant.

National rounds played

Percent change in rounds, 2007 vs. 2006

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	YTD
Total U.S. facilities	-20.6%	-10.6%	11.3%	-15.1%	5.4%	3.4%	-1.8%
Private clubs	-18.3%	-6.1%	6.0%	-15.4%	4.5%	2.9%	-2.7%
Public courses	-21.3%	-12.1%	12.6%	-15.0%	5.6%	3.6%	-1.6%
Premium	-8.7%	-3.3%	6.4%	-7.5%	1.6%	4.6%	-0.4%
Standard	-15.8%	-8.1%	7.8%	-15.6%	6.7%	5.0%	-0.9%
Value	-27.2%	-16.9%	16.2%	-15.9%	5.6%	2.9%	-2.1%

Figures represent facilities that have submitted rounds data for both time periods. Source: National Golf Foundation, as of 8/15/07

Construction report

as of 8/14/2007

Type	Under construction*			Completed*		
	9-hole	18-hole	Total	9-hole	18-hole	Total
New facilities						
Daily fee	27	118	145	10	26	36
Municipal	10	7	17	2	4	6
Private	8	69	77	6	17	23
Total	45	194	239	18	47	65
Additions						
Daily fee	89	5	94	13	3	16
Municipal	4	1	5	1	0	1
Private	9	5	14	9	3	12
Total	102	11	113	23	6	29
Grand total	147	205	352	41	53	94

* Figures don't include courses classified as reconstructions. (57) nine-hole and (90) 18-hole reconstructed courses were under construction and (16) 9-hole and (31) 18-hole reconstructed courses opened. • Source: National Golf Foundation