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## THE VALUE OF EXPERTISE

**M**om-and-pop facilities have made course renovations without using golf course architects for budget and access reasons for a long time. That's more understandable than successful clubs spending a lot of money on projects, often on everything but a qualified golf course architect.

Some clubs seemingly look for anyone and everyone to take the place of a golf course architect, and I don't know why. Perhaps green committee members – people who would never entrust the renovation of a commercial building they own to an amateur – think because their golf courses are natural instead of sticks and bricks, they don't require professional help. Others relish their chance to play golf course architect, either by themselves or using a golf course architect only to draw their ideas or keep them from making mistakes. In such cases, a golf course architect usually is credited for all the unpopular new features, and a green chairman receives credit for all the favorite ones.

I've seen clubs choose to use retired golf pros; current golf directors; contractors or bulldozer operators; turf, irrigation or other suppliers with a vested interest; project facilitators (even though architects and contractors are usually self-facilitating); golf writers; and restoration experts or historians as pseudo or substitute architects. Each says he brings a unique perspective and the project can't get built or renovated with only a golf course architect involved.

There can be merit to those unique perspectives, but in my view, it's often the other way around. Most "consultants" could use the company name "Miracle Golf" and the advertising slogan "If it's a good course, it's a miracle."

During a construction project, a golf course architect's broad perspective and impartial, unbiased, fee-based advice and expertise in design and construction usually proves most valuable. The knowledge gap between golf course architects and the oth-

ers mentioned above is often a vast chasm. Many of those consultants don't even know what they don't know. Ignorance isn't bliss. If you don't think so, ask yourself or other experts how many of the questions on this page you or they know the answers to.

Of course, the answers will vary from place to place, but the underlying knowledge to supply the correct answer won't. Others might know some answers, but I doubt they (or to be fair, the golf course

architect) will know all. You could spend months or years finding these answers, but an experienced golf course architect has done that for you already and has the talent to put those ideas into practice.

The "savings" from not hiring an architect usually turn out to be false, as demonstrated by most architects getting their remodeling business the second time around. And, even if your situation calls for other consultants, a golf course architect still is your best resource to lead a team to its goal of proper design and construction for your long-lasting enjoyment. **GCI**

### Architect knowledge

How many of these questions can you answer? These are questions that shed light on how much knowledge a golf course architect brings to the table during a construction project.

- What are the effects of soils, sun and wind on our design?
- How many parts per million of salt can our turf take in irrigation water?
- What's the best length for the golf course and its typical players?
- What's a safe distance between parallel fairways and boundaries?
- What's the typical spray pattern for golf shots that allows safe play?
- How close together can greens and tees be?
- How wide of a path allows easy two-way circulation and easy movement around the clubhouse?
- Are our tees and greens the right size for our play levels?
- Do our tees need mix and drainage?
- What method and materials should we use to rebuild our greens?
- At our green speeds, what's the maximum slope in cupping areas?
- With our turf, climate and mowing, what's the maximum green slope overall?
- Does our course need to meet ADA requirements?
- What other permits do we need to proceed?
- How do we meet new environmental regulations?
- Can we control drainage on the course and avoid floods better?
- Are our bunkers properly positioned to create strategy?
- How far from the green should our bunkers be?
- Do we have the right sand?
- What bunkers can we eliminate and still have a nice course?
- How wide should tree corridors be for comfortable play?
- What species are worth saving, and which should we avoid?
- Can we save our irrigation system when building improvements?
- Are our cart paths located properly? Are they safe?
- What grasses are best for our tees, greens and fairways?
- Who are the best contractors to bid this project?
- Should we accept the lowest bid automatically?
- What's a reasonable schedule?



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**Jim McLoughlin** is the founder of TMG Golf ([www.TMGgolfcounsel.com](http://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@roadrunner.com](mailto:golfguide@roadrunner.com) or 760-804-7339. His previous columns can be found on [www.golfcourseindustry.com](http://www.golfcourseindustry.com).

## READERS ARE LISTENING

This is the 35th consecutive column I've had the privilege of writing for this magazine, which suggests this is an appropriate time to summarize reader reactions to my columns.

**PERSONAL CAREER WEB SITES** (See November 2004, May 2007 and September 2007 columns)

Once this concept was introduced in November 2004, it triggered immediate interest throughout the GCSAA membership. But, few knew how to develop a Web site or where to find the necessary counseling. The initiative of several GCSAA members cured this problem when they produced model Web sites and were willing to share their methodology with interested parties. Sample evidence of the high level that Web sites can attain can be found at [www.stevenrenzetti.com](http://www.stevenrenzetti.com), [www.michaelmumper.com](http://www.michaelmumper.com) and [www.michaelmongon.com](http://www.michaelmongon.com). Early history now is showing definitively that quality Web sites not only guarantee interviews but also are winning jobs against highly competitive candidate fields as well.

Despite this wide acceptance, several problems persist.

1. Many assistants and superintendents wait until job openings surface before committing to Web-site development. Because it takes as long as three months to produce a quality Web site under normal conditions, these job applicants miss the mark and quickly learn Web sites should be developed during the quiet times before jobs open.

2. Early in their careers, assistants and superintendents fear their job experience is insufficient to justify a Web site. This is a mistake because search committees always will respect a job applicant's taking the initiative to develop a well-organized Web site no matter what a candidate's depth of experience might be at the time.

3. Veteran superintendents dismiss the need for a personal Web site because they feel the major part of their careers are behind them. This is also a mistake because

a personal Web site will serve as a safety net should a superintendent have to, or want to, look for another job late in a career.

4. Too few job applicants write for publication. Because search committees respond favorably to candidates' writings, everyone is encouraged to get published early and often in their careers – initially for chapter newsletters, then for regional and national publications.

**WRITTEN CONTRACTS** (See October 2007 column)

No column I've written has generated a quicker response throughout the GCSAA membership than the issue of so few superintendents having access to written contracts when so many managers and golf professionals do. Association members also note disappointingly there has been no effort to address this pressing but addressable

issue. The good news is that superintendents are learning how to earn job security, i.e., negotiate or earn three months of job security with pay for each year of satisfactory employment up to a maximum of 12 months. This approach negates employers' primary concern about written contracts, i.e., the risk of a bad hire.

**JOB SECURITY THROUGH THE RULES** (See August 2007 column)

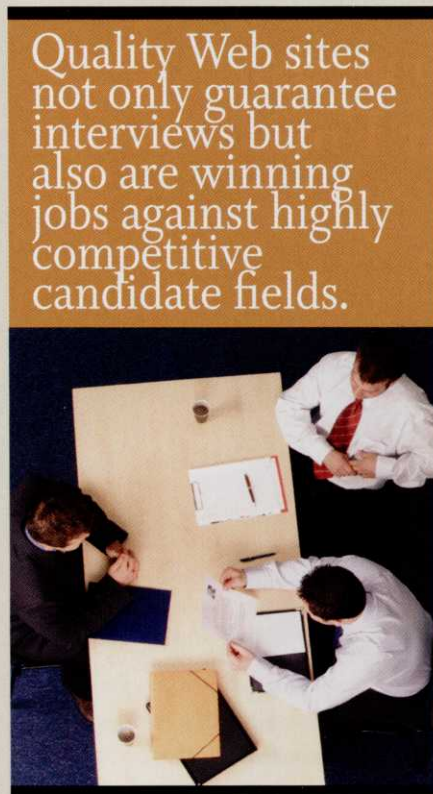
Once considered a necessary evil throughout the superintendents' world, more GCSAA members are quickly learning the Rules of Golf can become an unexpected friend to all those who embrace them because job security can be enhanced, a commitment to the Rules provides unique career marketing opportunities and the Rules present an enjoyable opportunity to engage the game of golf at a high intellectual level.

**GOVERNANCE POLICIES** (See October and November 2005 columns, as well as January and February 2007 columns)

Without question, core GCSAA members prefer individual voting to block chapter voting, want input into the nominating process, wish the GCSAA board would function more transparently and are disappointed board members' perks separate board culture from members' culture. However, while the association's chapter-oriented national power base acknowledges these membership priorities, it prefers to maintain the status quo, at least for the moment. Stay tuned.

**SABBATICAL LEAVE** (See July 2005 column)

Many might be surprised to learn the GCSAA members' collective interest in the sabbatical leave concept has been as strong as the expressed interest in personal Web sites. However, the difference between the two is that the need for a sabbatical leave occurs less frequently and much later in one's career. Consequently, live models of sabbatical-leave applications will evolve at a slower pace over the coming years. Accordingly, superintendents are advised to keep the sabbatical leave concept on their long-range radar screens. **GCI**



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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](mailto:jackbrennan@tampabay.rr.com).

## CREATE OR UPDATE YOUR PLAN

**D**uring the holidays, I had a business experience that made my new year brighter. Maybe my experience will assist you when you create or update your next golf course marketing plan.

A recently hired general manager contacted me through my Web site and informed me he was assigned to create a marketing plan for his course by January 1. He wanted a few minutes of my time to help organize his thoughts for a plan. Although my wife and I were vacationing for the holidays, I gave him a call to see how I could help. After a few minutes, I could tell

he was feeling pressure from the responsibility of generating a marketing plan. Once I got a feel for the type of course, general market information, rounds, rates, competition, etc. (he was informed about his new course, which helped me), I began to explain the different sections of a marketing plan he should write for it to be meaningful.

A few minutes turned into more than an hour. I could tell he was feverishly writing what I was telling him, so I suggested sending him a bullet-pointed outline of what he should include in his unique marketing plan and promised to review it with him.

I made some modifications to my table-of-contents template to address his unique market better based on what he told me and e-mailed it to him. When I called him, he not only sounded appreciative, but it was as if a light bulb had gone on in the innate marketing side of his brain.

The most important part of creating a marketing plan is gathering meaningful research. Without accurate research and the correct interpretation of the research, a marketing plan is just a hit-and-miss guide. It's better than no plan, but it will take a few seasons to pinpoint where the true, most profitable target audiences are.

Here's what I sent the general manager I hope it will help anybody who wants to write a marketing plan but doesn't know where to begin.

**Purpose statement.** Give the reasons you're preparing a marketing plan. For example, "The following marketing plan has been prepared to quantify, in rounds and revenue, 2008 sales and marketing goals for XYZ Golf Club." Explain how you intend to do that.

### Daily sales objectives and tasks.

Explain what you'll do to influence rounds and revenue on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis to your course. Make it read like a sales and marketing job description.

**Golf market overview.** Give a general description of your golf market – private club versus public courses, resort/destination market, municipal facilities, etc. Explain where your course fits in to the competitive golf market grid (positioning) and how you'll compete. What will you do differently than your competition?

**Golf rounds demand analysis.** Read my July 2007 and September 2007 columns ([www.golfcourseindustry.com](http://www.golfcourseindustry.com)) for a detailed explanation.

**Primary business targets.** This section will likely change for every golf course. Some golf markets focus heavily on outing business; others don't. Golf courses in destination markets will focus a significant part of their marketing plans on partnerships with lodging facilities. Golf markets aren't the same. To identify your most profitable business targets and create marketing programs to invite those targets to your course, you must be able to rely on accurate market research and the correct interpretation of that research. See my November 2007 column.

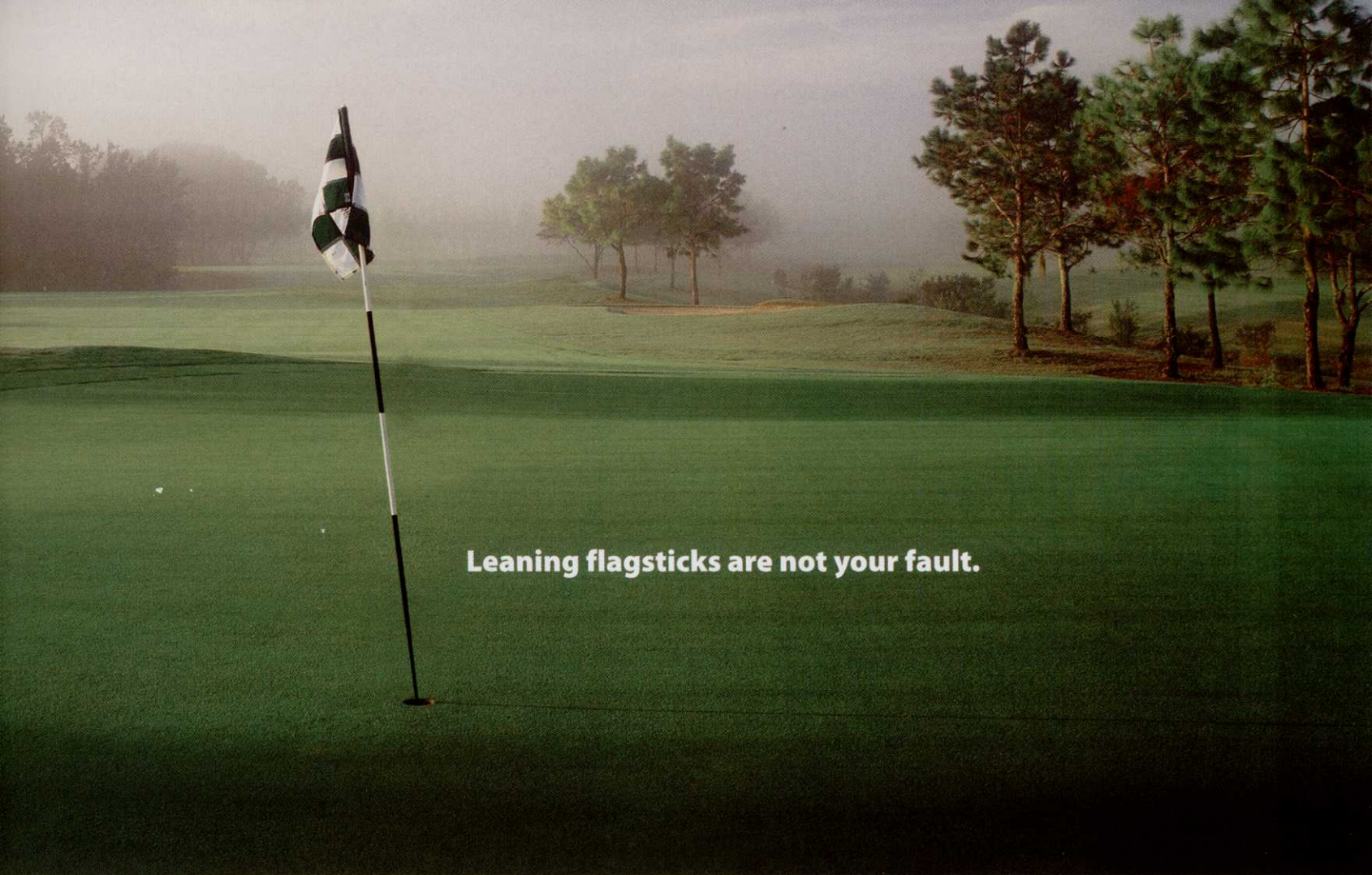
**Competitor analysis.** Identify your competition based on your primary targets of play. Do what you can to identify their share (number of rounds) of those targets and evaluate what resources (time and money) need to be spent on getting your fair share.

**Sales and marketing strategies and tactics.** For each of your target business segments, your strategy is your goal. For example, "I plan to increase my outing business by 3,000 rounds." Your tactics are what you'll actually do to increase that segment.

I called the general manager the next two days to check on his progress. He did a fine job writing the plan, but he will need to continue conducting market research before the plan will be reliable and viable. **GC**

### Marketing plan table of contents

- I. Purpose statement
- II. 2007 daily sales objectives and tasks
- III. Golf market overview
- IV. Golf rounds demand analysis:
  1. Consumer reported rounds (population)
  2. Facility reported rounds
- V. Primary business targets
  - A. Geographic:
    1. Local
    2. Regional
    3. Feeder markets (if any)
  - B. Marketing programs (forms and letters included)
    1. Memberships
    2. Group business
    3. Marketing to tournament and outing coordinators
    4. Hotel/motel partnership programs
    5. Frequent player program
    6. Outside play
- VI. Competitor analysis
- VII. 2007 Sales and marketing strategies and tactics
- VIII. 2007 Sales and marketing revenue plan
- IX. 2007 Advertising and promotions
  - A. Advertising and promotion overview
  - B. Advertising and promotion plan/budget
  - C. Marketing budget rationale
  - D. Research – quarterly survey
  - E. Evaluation of marketing goals
- X. 2008 preplanning calendar



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## Purchasing habits

There's a distinct buyer profile among golfers. Buyers are different from golfers. Almost all golfers have to buy something at some point – a starter set, golf balls, a pull cart. But buyers are regularly in the market because they want to be or they have to be. Perhaps they have to have the latest technology or the newest models they believe will help improve scores. Perhaps they wear their equipment quickly.

For example, club buyers (defined as spending \$200 or more on new clubs during the past year) play more frequently, are more skilled, have higher incomes, are more likely to take golf trips and are more tuned into



golf media. Premium golf shirt buyers, almost half of whom are private-club members, also have a discrete profile. They play twice as many rounds as the average

golfer, they're twice as likely to be retired, they have relatively high incomes (\$152,300 on average), they're older (average 59), and they're keen on golf media.

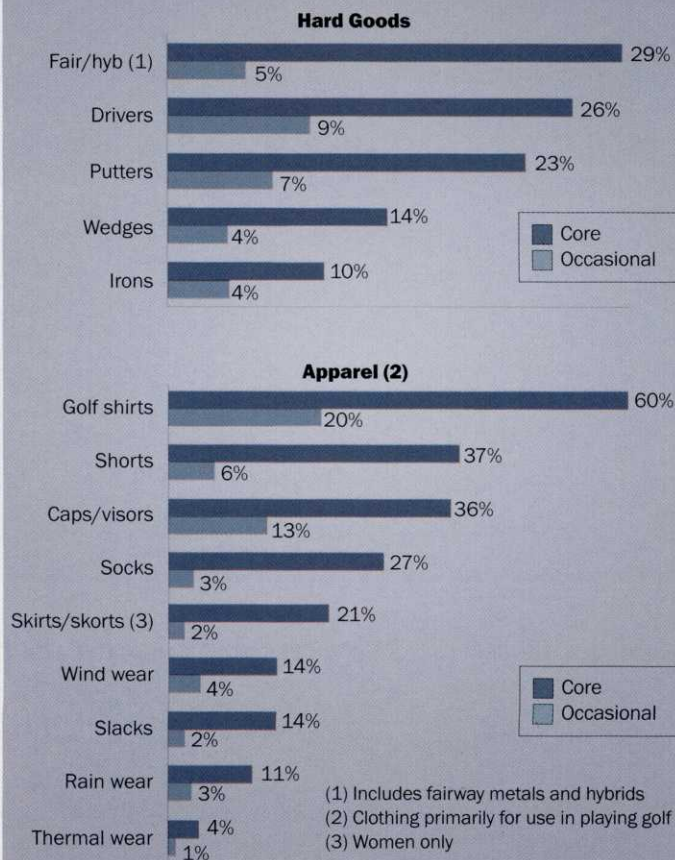
Purchase incidence differs by player frequency and product category. Core golfers (those playing eight or more rounds a year) are more likely than occasional golfers (one to seven rounds a year) to purchase any given golf product throughout the year. But core golfer purchase incidence varies greatly by product. While 76 percent of core golfers bought golf balls during the past year, 26 percent bought a driver, 42 percent bought shoes, 4 percent bought thermal outerwear, and 22 percent bought a golf bag. Why did only three-quarters of core golfers buy golf balls during the past year? Possible reasons: Frequent golfers are likely to find and reuse a lot of golf balls while playing; they might have enough golf balls on hand and need to replace them only every few years; they might be skilled enough that they don't lose many balls; they might play on courses that lack many hazards where balls are lost; or they might be satisfied playing balls that aren't in the best condition.

The statistics and charts on this page are based on more than 2,000 U.S. golfers who completed an online survey in May 2007 from the National Golf Foundation. The sample was drawn from global market research firm Synovate's nationally representative panel of 2.6 million Americans.

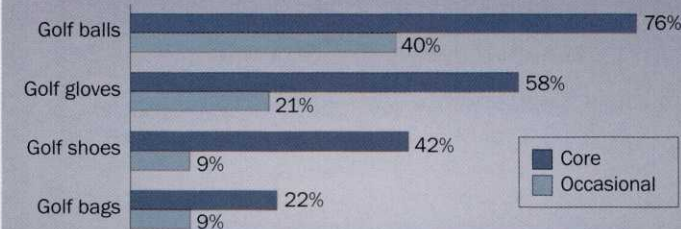
Source: National Golf Foundation

### Golf equipment purchase incidence

Percentage of golfers who purchase or received equipment/apparel in the past 12 months (at least one item of the given category). Includes premium and nonpremium, new and used.



### Soft goods purchase incidence



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# A keen understanding

Lori Russell works to make chapter associations more valuable

By Pat Jones

BASE

Local chapters are dealing with a lack of volunteer leaders and financial support, says Lori Russell. Photo: Mark Bryant

FOR THE RECORD, LORI RUSSELL argued vehemently that she didn't want me to write a profile about her.

"Why don't you write an article about one of our members," she asks. "Nobody wants to know about me. I'm not very interesting. I'm afraid."

Obviously, I won that argument.

Russell runs three superintendent chapters in the Northwest and is one of a handful of paid local association managers in the country. She's a veteran member of GCSAA's Chapter Relations Committee. She's constantly on the go, organizing meetings and events throughout six states for the Peaks & Prairies, Inland Empire and Idaho GCSAs. She's a mom to three teen-aged kids, and she's been married to a golf course

superintendent for 25 years.

It's fair to say Russell has a good perspective on the daily life of golf course managers and their families and that she has a keen understanding of the challenges and opportunities for chapters at a time when local and state associations are struggling to increase meeting attendance and keep revenue flowing.

Russell was in high school and working in a clothing store in her native Billings, Mont., when the owner told her about a guy her husband played softball with who might be fun to date. The guy was Tom Russell, an aspiring golf course superintendent. They met in June and were in love by July, but, as she recalls, "It took me four years to finally hook him."