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LEAN & MEAN

About every 10 minutes during the jam-packed 2011 GIS, someone would say to me: "I can't remember a national show where you could stand in the middle of the floor and see the walls at either end." I could indulge in all manner of evocative metaphors ("The walls are closing in on the market!") to describe this phenomenon, but instead I'll say this: It is what it is... get used to it.

Orlando was notable for many things, but it was most noteworthy for its sheer reality. It was a microcosm of the new golf market. It was lean and mean.

Among my observations, there was much ballyhoo about "adjusted attendance" and seminars being up. Hosts said there were about 5,700 "qualified buyers." They are loathe to admit how many actual superintendents registered, but it was probably around 2,500. That means only about one-sixth of all U.S. courses (plus some international) were represented, but it obviously tends to be bigger-budget courses with higher maintenance standards and an appetite for new products. That, kids, is not bad.

Okay, try not to faint, but kudos to the GCSAA for being straight about the overall attendance numbers and not blowing smoke about how massive the show is. The glory days of show expansion are over. But, thankfully, so is the attendance freefall. Orlando was a benchmark for the new normal and the association and the exhibitors need to deal with it. The new reality of the post-recession GIS is leaner, meaner, smarter and maybe healthier in the long run.

The CMAA's departure clarified and focused the event. It's once again a turf show, not a "turf plus napkins and wine glasses show." As painful as the divorce may have been, the vast majority of exhibitors were relieved to be dealing with their core customers instead of a weird mix of turfheads and food/bev guys.

Attendees were focused on being there for solid business reasons. Sure, there was partying and mucho camaraderie, but guys I talked with had a PLAN for their trip. They had selected seminars to help their facility or their careers. They hit the floor with an idea of what they needed to see.

Within days after the event, I started seeing supers' blogs outlining for their members/owners exactly what they'd seen, done and accomplished at the show. That's a smart way to document the facility's ROI in sending their guy to the event.

Maybe it was just me, but it seemed to be a "mature" group of supers in Orlando. I wonder if the younger guys stayed away because they're less secure in their jobs or didn't have the budget to go. Or, perhaps, they just don't connect with a big show because they have their own virtual network of buddies, self-education and suppliers back home.

Nearly everyone I spoke with was "cautiously optimistic" that the market is rebounding. Hell, I told everyone I saw I was cautiously optimistic. But, other than a few small budget studies that show some uptick in spending and a sense that capital budgets (equipment, remodeling) are starting to flow a little, there's little evidence to support that feeling. I believe it's mostly a sense of hope. As in, I am more hopeful that my facility won't go belly-up.

You should have seen the line of people in our booth waiting to talk with Tim Moraghan, Bruce Williams and other GCI contributors

who happen to be connected to the "big job" recruiting network. Like I said, the supers in Orlando had agendas and getting advice from these guys was near the top.

There was much Tweeting and Facebooking and social media buzzing. It was a lot of fun... for all 200 of us doing it. We sometimes forget that 85 percent of y'all aren't at this thing and most of the people who are at the show are not spending all of their time waiting for me or anyone else to prove our brilliance in 140 characters or less. Yet, look for much more of this as our market becomes more personal.

I'll conclude by saying with absolutely no modesty that my team kicked ass at GIS. We cranked out outstanding content, covered everything that deserved to be covered, shot hours of cool video and, yes, Tweeted and blogged our tails off. Why? Because like you, we know the same old crap doesn't fly in the brave new world of the golf course industry. **GCI**



Pat Jones

Editorial director and publisher

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Serving the Business of Golf Course Management

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FEEDBACK

Holiday bonus

Here is what I did for my staff this holiday season ("Is it payday yet?" December 2010, page 50). Each staff member was sent a photo CD of each of them and team members "in action" throughout the season, including course projects and a staff photo. Although only one staff member has replied back in appreciation from this most recent mailing, past experience has proven that this is greatly appreciated by most, if not all. My digital camera is always within reach, so taking daily photos is simple and easy to do. At times, I will give the camera to a staff member and instruct them to tour the course taking staff photos and things of interest. This is an excellent way to get photos from a different perspective. Obviously the cost associated with this gift amounts is minimal; just takes time, a CD and postage.

Just thought you should know your publication continues to be my favorite one to read, hands down, over the competition. I believe that says volumes about you and the people that you surround yourself with.

Scott "Otto" Austin,
CGCS Superintendent
Meadowbrook Golf Course
Saint Paul, Minn.

To read "Is it payday yet?" enter <http://tinyurl.com/4abryr8> into your Web browser.

Kudos

Another great edition of GCI. Thanks to all who make it the first to be read cover-to-cover from January to December.

Patrick Daly
Superintendent
Framingham Country Club
Framingham, Mass.

Check out the online archive to read any back issue of GCI.

Sad, but true

Just read Pat Jones column on trade shows ("The Cash Cow – RIP?" Jan. 2011, page 90) – interesting and very sad, but true.

Michael A. Maravich
Marketing/product manager,
turf and ornamental
Arysta LifeScience North America

Nailed it

Your January column ("The cash cow – R.I.P.?" page 90) nailed it!

I was vice president of sales for a small manufacturer of golf cars that also accommodated people with mobility impairments. We exhibited at both the PGA Show and the GIS Show. Prior to that, I attended these shows from a golf industry buyer's perspective. I have since retired.

Over about eight years starting in 1999, I watched viable potential for sales and marketing decline steadily at both shows for a couple of reasons. First, golf professionals and others [non-owners] who attended these shows apparently were not held accountable for getting something out of the shows because they increasingly became no-shows, and I know many of them were playing golf somewhere. The second reason for decreasing, meaningful traffic was the activities scheduled during show hours or near show hours. Certainly the economy probably had some impact the past few years on amount of traffic.

As an exhibitor, you go to these shows to expose your products to as many buyers and influencers as possible. We didn't go for seminars... we went to sell! There is a need for the seminars for the same people who attend these shows, but you can't do both at the same time. Apparently no one figured that out or didn't care. It depends on the agenda of those running the shows doesn't it?

The original PGA Merchandise event was a good idea and still is. What isn't a good idea are all the other shows that are scheduled which compete for exhibitors' time and money. What isn't a good idea is scheduling seminars and other events at a gathering designed for suppliers to show their products and for buyers to find out what their choices are. What isn't a good idea is to try to do too many things at the PGA show, and also at the GIS show. What isn't a good idea is to have a PGA show and a GIS show at different times with similar agendas for exhibitors... it is duplication for the exhibitors, costly duplication. Any business organization that strays from its core competency tends to dilute its efforts, spread its resources too widely, fail to serve its constituents and fail in achieving its original goals. The golf industry is finding that out.

Extra info

I had the pleasure of seeing Terry Buchen's presentation at the (2011 GIS) conference in Orlando and really enjoyed the innovative ideas he presented. I recall seeing a golf course that was using a smart board as a communication tool to its staff. Could you please tell me the name of that golf course? We are looking for new ways to communicate to our staff and would like to speak to someone who has tried this technology.

Darin Hull
Environmental management coordinator
The Glencoe Golf & Country Club
Calgary, AB



Editor's note: The "smart board" item appeared in the January 2010 issue and featured the innovative interactive whiteboard being used by William R. Larson, CGCS, and assistant superintendent Ryan Browning at the Town & Country Club in St. Paul, Minn.

There is no reason to have these two major shows... owners can and should come to the PGA show, particularly if they influence buying decisions. Owners at the PGA show might cause golf professionals and others attending to pay more attention to the show instead of area golf courses... to be "seen" by their bosses so to speak! If the industry wants educational seminars and events [they are needed], schedule them somewhere at a different time or after the PGA show and attend, undistracted by hundreds of major exhibitors! Why have all the regional shows if there is one national show that can be attended by all concerned to see all the major manufacturers and their products? Most, if not all of them, plus the GIS, are redundant, frankly. I attended the New England show so I know it is effectively redundant.

After manufacturers spend money and time on all these shows, they are rewarded by golf course buyers who understandably try to squeeze the lowest price they can [I know from the golf car experience]. Eventually, the money will run out and either the shows fail or the prices go up and the competition dries up. Who wins? As a golfer [consumer], I don't see me winning! Maybe that is one of the reasons the number of golfers is not growing.

Tom Durbin
Castle Rock, Colo.

To read "The cash cow - R.I.P.," enter <http://tinyurl.com/4zn5x6w> into your Web browser.

One-year mark

Editor's Note: GCI continues to receive an unprecedented amount of responses to Pat Jones's August 2010 column ("Catharsis," page 4). As has been our policy, we've shared these notes excerpted and anonymous because they often include personal comments.

Knowing how well you know us supers, it probably won't surprise you that I just read your article from last August. As per superintendent tradition, magazines pile up on the floor until the off season. However, reading Pat Jones' work is usually the exception, I usually read you, no matter the time of season.

If I calculate right, you hopefully celebrated the big one-year anniversary. That is very important to us one-day-at-a-timers. Your chances of continued sobriety after the one-year mark go up significantly. God willing, I will celebrate 27 years during the week of the Golf Industry Show. Of course that doesn't mean a damn thing, other than the day-at-a-time plan works beautifully.

You are good at what you do - most of us drunks usually work with half a day, half a brain and half the health of people working full-time at our careers.

I'm glad your boss knew the right course of action, and I am grateful that the disease did not take out another of our brethren. We need you.

To read "Catharsis," enter <http://tinyurl.com/49tfxgf> into your Web browser.

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