

Pro Business Practices That Whip Competition

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WHY SHOULD a pro have serious competition in the sale of golf merchandise? Have pros as a whole failed to grasp their advantages and opportunities? Some may have lost faith in the public's preferences for quality merchandise. Many pros are quite successful, irrespective of the fact that corner hardware, drug and grocery stores, and even filling stations, have begun to look at golf merchandising as a "bonanza" in which the more take part the merrier.

I am constrained to say the pros' worst competition is pros, when you get right down to hardpan. If all pros were really doing a businesslike selling job, fewer and better stores would attempt to sell golf merchandise. The pro really has most of the sales advantages if he will use them.

It is fundamentally essential to eliminate any waste of time, as well as money, and to increase income through greater sales effort and more business. It becomes essential to study the market thoroughly and make friends everywhere. Your members are your market and should be your friends.

Too many pros do not know intimately all the members of their clubs. They do not know all the women and children who have as active an interest in the affairs of the club as the better players. The youngsters will be the active members of the club of the future. Getting really acquainted is your first big job. The dubs and beginners can be interested in golf just as much, and can buy just as profitable merchandise as the low handicap men. Time spent in acquaintance helps you sell more clubs and other merchandise.

To sell merchandise of any kind a bond of interest must be created and maintained. The pro has so many chances to make friends, and create this necessary bond of interest, that it is amazing when he does not sell his services to better advantage—and grasp all the opportunities to make suggestions which result in sales. The pro should not permit dubs to appear nervous when playing in his presence, but rather should cultivate such players. Instead of fraternizing too much with the club's sharpshooters, the pro should do some unobtrusive, friendly coaching to assist the dub players to improve.

Naturally, we must remember we are dealing with personalities unlike in tastes. We must study our members as a lawyer studies his witnesses. By knowing members intimately we know what a man or woman or child likes or dislikes, and the task of pleasing such individuals is much easier as a result. When rendering a service, do it as if you enjoyed it.

Quality, popularity and price make merchandise. From the pro's point of view, quality should be paramount, as he has as members those who enjoy the better things in life. He should pay a great deal of attention to the loft, lie, balance and weight of the clubs he sells, as well as the construction of bags, balls and other merchandise. His members have keen eyes, and many, being business men, are keen judges

of merchandise irrespective of golf playing ability.

The popularity of merchandise being handled is important, too, but not so important as intrinsic value. All club members like to play with merchandise they regard highly, and the pro can influence them to use what he knows to be better.

Watch the Price

Price is important. Certainly those club members who are business men want to feel that they are making an intelligent purchase. They recognize the pro is entitled to a profit. But, I do not believe very many of them will grant his service is worth more than 35 to 40 per cent mark-up. After all he must compete with retail stores, and with margins made in other types of merchandise. There has been a tendency to a larger mark-up, which results in price cutting and induces competition to come into the field.

Just as quality, popularity and price make merchandise, so merchandising, service and policy make a successful business. In selecting merchandise, the pro should have the members of his club definitely in mind. He should be familiar with the bags on the rack and know his probable prospects intimately. With this in mind he is in position to select his merchandise with extreme care so as to keep his inventory to a minimum. Manufacturers cannot afford to take back merchandise for many obvious reasons, and the pro cannot afford to have very much distress merchandise. Consequently it is essential to buy with extreme care.

Don't Fear Selling

Now, many pros seem ashamed to let members know they have golf equipment for sale. They prefer to appear as sportsmen rather than business men. Of course you men must be tactful, but we need not fear sales effort. Did you ever see a live store doing business without displaying merchandise? Pros should have an attractively displayed stock of new, well selected merchandise, suitable for all ages and sexes. Merchandise should be arranged neatly. It should be changed frequently, and if there are many women and children members, merchandise should be displayed in a special section for them. If the shop is conveniently located, well enough. If the shop is inconveniently located, merchandise might well be displayed around the clubhouse, at the first tee, the

18th hole or other equally good locations. So much for display.

It seems to me a pro should have neatly lettered price tags or cards on each item of merchandise. I have been told by club members that they were quoted one price one day and a different price the next. This is inexcusable. It gives a buyer a great deal of confidence to find price tags on merchandise, as it definitely indicates the same price is asked of all prospective purchasers. You find this true in chain stores and it works. Each pro can make home-made signs, for that matter.

Then display some national advertising about your shop. Tie in with what the manufacturer is doing to help sell merchandise. Leave some magazines about with the ad pages up.

It is not a bad idea to guarantee your merchandise and make good on it. While the manufacturer carefully inspects each item of merchandise, and can tell pretty definitely when it has been abused, there are certain adjustments the pro can well afford to make. The cause of trouble generally is mis-use and abuse.

Circularize Often

Further in connection with merchandise, I think it wise to circularize members frequently. You can send out a nice, inexpensive form letter. With the bills can go an insert supplied by the manufacturer, or prepared by yourself. Ask the members of the board of directors, the president and other officers of the club to assist you in building up your business with your members, since the income from the shop is part of your salary. Let the members of the club know that you are a business man, as well as a pro. Let them know that you appreciate their business, as it is part of your income, compensating you for the service you render to the members of your club. In the meantime be certain that you are rendering a really worthwhile service.

If you are on a municipal or fee course, you can pick up "specials" occasionally to compete with down-town stores. The good manufacturer is making his goods as his orders are received, figuratively speaking, so that there is not much distress merchandise. Just the same, there is usually a little you can get from a legitimate manufacturer. In the meantime, make salesmen out of your assistants. Teach them how to render service to the members of your club. Teach them to smile. Then, too, it will pay you and your assistants to make frequent trips

through retail stores in your community. Observe the merchandise being sold, how it is being displayed, the price being asked. Personally, I would not recommend the selection of merchandise, the fair resale price of which is not being observed by the manufacturer or other outlets.

Group Lessons Build

In connection with service, it might be worth while to give lessons to women and children in groups. This will stimulate interest in golf, induce more people to take up the game and eventually lead to more individual lessons. It might not be a bad idea to offer one lesson free in five. When selling a new set of clubs it might be good business to agree to keep them in condition for one season without charge. There are lots of little stunts a pro can do to win friendship, and ingratiate himself in the minds of his members when merchandise is needed. He can give talks on golf to the entire club membership. He can give it to groups of men, women or children. In some communities he can write a series of articles on golf and how to play it. Newspapers are frequently glad to have such a service. After all, this is promotion work which builds up the industry and creates a greater interest in the game. After all we must have an eye to the younger generation coming on, and the constant desire to induce more people to take up the game. We must help them play a better game and keep them interested and enthused.

If I were a pro, I would regard my job as my business. I would reason, therefore, that I need a sound business policy to tie to. I would remember that revenue from the sale of merchandise is part of my income or salary. Therefore, I must be a business man and make a legitimate profit from my activity. I would expect to win friends by a reasonable mark-up—and at the same time sell more goods and make more ultimate profit. I would recognize the importance of a quick moving inventory. When I found myself with merchandise that did not sell, I would mark it down quickly. The first loss is always the cheapest. I would disapprove of those manufacturers who sell office to office or who sell promiscuously at wholesale to institutions on a group buying basis, or who deliberately or indirectly contribute to illegitimate price cutting. I would cooperate with those companies who are trying to play the game squarely and fairly. I would back up the Professional Golfers'

Association with all the enthusiasm I possess. This would make a pretty sound business policy for the pro to observe.

Makers and Pros Allies

In the sale of golf merchandise every reliable manufacturer knows that if he could induce pros as a whole to become good merchants, the sale of real good golf equipment would be increased greatly. The chances of satisfying the ultimate user would be a hundred-fold more certain. The manufacturer is keen to receive intelligent and active pro cooperation.

I am thinking too of credits. It is a somewhat touchy subject but an important one. Though the pro's credit is better now than at any time in the history of the game, there are too many overdue accounts. Manufacturers enjoy dealing with pros who pay their bills promptly. Charging goods is like borrowing money. Manufacturers need their money to pay for raw materials and labor, just as the pro or any other individual needs the money due him to meet his obligations. It is mighty good business practice to pay bills on the spot when due.

There is no question but what the character of pro merchandising has developed tremendously in the last few years. Professionals are buying more intelligently, stocking more carefully, selling more wisely, and paying their bills more promptly. As one large manufacturer selling about half the professionals, we know these things are true—and want to assist and encourage the improvement in every way we possibly can. We recognize the pro as a logical outlet for golf merchandise, and also realize that he is meeting with unfair and unprofitable competition in many instances. We very energetically disapprove of merchandising policies which put the professional to a disadvantage in merchandise, price, credit or whatever it may be. We do believe the pro a very logical outlet for golf merchandise and want to help him to success.

CUT

THERE ARE two methods of thickening bent turf quickly. The first way is to fertilize vigorously; the second method consists in sowing redtop in the thin spots, since redtop germinates quickly and grows rapidly in its early stages.

The second method is a makeshift and not recommended unless the bent turf is in very poor condition.