

# Adjusting Pro Methods to Meet Current Competition

By **LEE HARRINGTON**

Professional golf businessmen now are in the first competitive year since 1940. Their competition is not only with other golf retail outlets but with all other business that's after the consumer's dollar. The current situation calls for pros making wise use of the outside viewpoint in examining their marketing operations. The pro may think he's doing as well as could be expected on his job and if he doesn't sell any more it is the fault of "conditions" rather than because of any error of omission or commission on his part. But he can't be sure of that until he's discreetly checked up on his members' judgment of his operations.

The members seldom understand the pro business situation. They don't realize, for instance, that golf goods have advanced in price since Pearl Harbor less than almost everything else used in recreation. Consequently there is very slight chance of decline in golf merchandise prices and the prospective customer who holds off buying is going to have a long wait. This phase of the golf business never was advertised sufficiently by pros when there was a general price increase with golf goods lagging behind in retail price hikes. But it's still not too late for a pro to show that present day prices of equipment compare favorably with those of 1940.

The pro is in the stage of having to go after his market stronger and employ the same methods the live small retailer in other lines uses. That means some steady advertising and frequent change of clean, attractive and well-balanced display of merchandise. In these days the pro can't expect the customer to come into his shop and "give up" any more than any other merchant could expect such easy selling.

## Market Survey Primary Need

The professional who hasn't made a careful survey of his members' equipment — or in the case of a pay-play course, the equip-

ment he sees at the first tee — is shooting blind at his market. He can't be certain of what to stock unless he has made a study of definite data on what his present and potential customers are using.

Good selling begins with good stocking to fit the market. And in fitting the market properly the pro must first think of how he fits his field. Personal grooming, as well as pleasant temperament, is a very strong factor in the pro selling job. Out in the hot sun at the lesson tee may work up a sweat that is unsightly and malodorous. Particularly with women's business becoming more important at clubs does the element of pro grooming figure in selling. A fellow with dirty fingernails or carelessly attired has no place in first class golf merchandising.

The pro has to remember that he is dealing in luxury merchandise. You don't see men or women in luxury shops who look like they'd just come in from making the rounds on a refuse wagon. The pro must see to it that his assistants are well groomed. An assistant can have a nice manner but if he doesn't look dressed for the job the golfers won't believe that he fits the situation.

In every respect the pro has to present himself and his business operations so a comparison can be made with the finest retailing job that's being done in town, and made without unfavorable reflection on the pro.

## Price Tags Important

The lack of plain, neat price tags on pro shop merchandise is the most serious flaw in pro merchandising these days. The lack of such tags scares off sales for the market today is especially sensitive to price. The tags should have a business look to them instead of being sloppily scrawled in pencil or ink. In the past two years I have seen instances where sales have picked up 20% to 30% entirely as the result of dis-

playing price tags on pro shop merchandise.

There isn't a single valid reason for not displaying price tags on merchandise in pro shops. Some pros maintain that putting price tags on sets of clubs may have a costly effect on trade-in business. They hike the prices on new clubs and offer high trade-in allowances which they say gets business because the man who trades-in old clubs is sold by getting a longer allowance.

That's taking too much of a chance to have it rated as good merchandising that will keep business sold. The customer may find out that he's been stuck by having a price higher than list put on the new clubs. Or even if he doesn't make a deal he probably thinks the pro has quoted him too high on new merchandise and too low on the used clubs. The price tag builds confidence, and confidence is one of the essentials in sound merchandising by the pro.

This element of confidence is weakened when the pro doesn't give the players a good break on sweepstakes, blind bogeys and drawings. The pro is making a profit on the sales of this merchandise and has no need to cut himself in for too strong a percentage. The wider the distribution of prizes, the more golf play there's going to be and the pro's sales are usually in direct ratio to the play at his course. The 105-shooter who wins a ball or two in return for his entry fee is going to be encouraged to play more, buy more and better equipment and take some lessons.

In making a thorough study of his market almost every pro will be surprised at finding that many of his members play fewer than 20 games a year. The pro's big job right now is to develop more play among people who don't use their membership as much as they should. This year the businessmen who don't play much golf really need the exercise, recreation and change of pace that golf furnishes. It's the pro who has to sell this. The pro, right now, with businessmen somewhat nervous about a recession in general business, can arouse keener golfing interest among many of his members and protect his club and himself against a slump in membership.

#### **Watch the Inventory**

Never before has it been so important that the pro know about his members—their temperaments, their financial status, their children, their social likes and dislikes. All this knowledge has to be used diplomatically and for the good of the member. This sort of personal knowledge and interest is what distinguishes good pro department merchandising from other retail selling.

This intimate acquaintance with the market is necessary in determining how

much money should be tied up in pro shop inventory and in what items. The pro may find that his stock is out of balance with his market. Then, of course, he won't turn over his investment enough to make the profit he should be making on his money.

While the season is at its height close watch should be kept on slow moving items. Anything that stays in stock longer than it should ought to be moved out even if you have to sell it at cost price just to get your money back—minus the cost of handling. You can use your money to good advantage in buying stock that will turn over. When you make these cuts in price to move merchandise don't let anybody get the idea that the stock isn't good. If the customers know you over-bought for your sales possibilities they'll realize they are getting a bargain but if they think you are stuck because you loaded up on lemons you won't have much of a chance to unload.

Right now pros are saying that there aren't nearly as many first class assistants available as there were before the war. The pros' criticism is that too many of today's assistants want to be paid good salaries for attending to the improvement of their own games.

An important part of the solution to that problem is for the pro to work out an incentive plan that will increase the assistant's earnings commensurate with his brains, energy and reliability. An assistant whose performance directly increases the pro's revenue is the best bargain a pro can get and the young fellow deserves a percentage commensurate with the demonstrated value of his services to the pro.

These incentive systems are not easy to establish on a basis fair to all concerned, but the right answer has to be determined or the pro shop operation isn't sound. There's plenty of talk about the club officials not having any idea of the extent of a pro's costs of doing business but not mentioned is the frequency of assistants feeling that they're underpaid when they actually are getting a pretty good income considering the pro's expenses. That condition has to be corrected in order to get the right selling and service spirit in the pro shop.

The pro himself often doesn't realize that his time is money at his club, therefore he should be careful in budgeting his time. With the comparatively short season that prevails at most clubs north of the Mason-Dixon line about every hour of the pro's working day must be devoted to an income-producing activity. And especially this year must the pro realize that his income is directly in proportion to the time he spends thinking and working on his job.