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# Merchandising for Pro Shops To Meet Store Competition

**By LOUIS BERTOLONE**

Clubs that hire a pro expect him to look after the needs of members. A club does not want its members buying their golf supplies elsewhere, or taking lessons from another club pro in the vicinity. When this happens, the club stands to lose members. And no club wants to lose members.

How much business are pros missing? And why are they missing this business? Golf is played only at one place, the golf course. Hence every golfer, sooner or later, must come into contact, either in a superficial manner or as a deeply interested patron, with the golf shop. The deeply interested patron is not our primary concern in this article because he already buys his merchandise from the pro at the course. We are here interested in the superficial patron, the man or woman, who buys golf supplies from a downtown store, be it a sporting goods shop, a drug store, hardware store, or what have you. And believe me, this part of the market should be the concern of every golf pro; not only because of loss in revenue but because the golf course golf shop should get most of this business as the logical place for consumers of golf supplies to make their purchases.

The salesmen at the golf courses have the advantage over the downtown store in securing this golf business; yet the amount of golf supplies that are bought through other channels is too large. One store in a Pacific Coast city does an annual gross business of over \$100,000 in the sales of golf clubs, bags, etc. An estimate of the amount of golf supplies that are bought in downtown stores in that city is several times \$100,000. Putting a gross profit on this merchandise, again conservatively, at 30%, one can easily

figure the loss in revenue suffered by the dozen pros in this vicinity, about \$90,000, or approximately \$7,500 per golf course pro.

A lot of business in any man's league, to lose, especially when at least, half of this business could be brought through the course shop without too much difficulty.

## Accent on Display

In order to get this business the golf course pros must have well-stocked golf shops. But even more important, the golf supplies and merchandise must be prominently displayed in an artistic and appealing manner. It must catch the eye of every person coming into the shop. If the pro, or his assistants have no talents in arranging displays, I suggest that the pro get in touch with a department store window trimmer. Employ his services for only one day of each month. He will see to it that your merchandise is displayed in a manner that will attract customers. That is his business. He is a professional at his trade and the few dollars that will be required to obtain his services will be offset by satisfaction in knowing that your displays are as professionally arranged as those of your competitor whose business you are trying to entice through your shop, and by increased sales.

I have seen innumerable well-stocked golf shops. In fact only recently I was told of a golf shop which claimed the distinction of being the finest golf shop on the west coast. This is quite a claim to make; so I went over to inspect it. I was indeed taken by surprise.

The shop must have had at least \$30,000 to \$35,000 worth of new golf merchandise in it. The shop itself is huge, hav-



Van Fossen photo

## TOM CULLINAN, ASST. PRO, IN MEDINAH CC SHOP GOLF SHOE SECTION

When women get into the habit of "shopping" at the pro shop they give the shop considerable advertising, as well as business. They talk about values and bargains. They usually are instinctively good judges of merchandise. When men around a club hear women talking favorably of pro shop goods the men members get the idea the pro is a good, sound merchant. Price tags draw women, but women aren't shy about asking the price if merchandise isn't plainly priced. Men often are backward about asking; afraid they'll be rated as "cheap" if they don't buy.

ing approximately 2000 square feet of space devoted to displays. This area does not include the area for club repairing, club cleaning and club storage space. So far so good. . . . But. . . The pleasant surprise ended there.

The merchandise was so poorly displayed that it created a bad impression. The clubs were lined up in racks against the walls in the customary way. Bags were thrown about the shop in a random fashion. Shoes and sweaters peered out of boxes that bore marks of careless handling. Tissue paper protruded from under the squashed-on covers, giving an appearance to the merchandise of having been cursorily inspected, and more swiftly replaced into the box, and then thrown away in disgust. This carelessness prevailed throughout the shop. Torn and dirty old magazines littered the tables, the floor was unswept. The bargain barrel

sat right in the middle of the floor, where every customer nearly tripped over it. The shop didn't have the immaculate atmosphere of a down town shop.

After having your shop fully stocked and the merchandise prominently and artistically displayed be sure that you and your assistants radiate confidence, enthusiasm, and cheerfulness. When anyone, and I mean anyone, asks you, "How are things going?" reply in the affirmative with a positive tone to your voice, accentuate your biggest sales item, and follow up with optimism for the future. I prefer the line that I learned from a caddy a long time ago. When I asked him how business was with him, he replied, "I earned \$7.20 today, my best day so far, but I expect to earn more tomorrow."

This makes the customers feel that you are doing a good job, that you are giving

them satisfaction, and more important, it makes the buyer who has been patronizing a downtown store feel that you have something on the ball. It makes him think that you are the leader in the golf business.

Watch your players' golf bags. When you see new clubs in them that were purchased elsewhere, you know you have missed a bet. You have under-estimated this person's needs or taste. You waited too long before calling his attention to the 1950 models that have just arrived in your shop or which you expect to arrive in a week or two.

### Don't Scold Them — Sell Them

Above all, do not ask the person where he bought them, and then go on and tell him that the clubs don't fit him — even if they don't fit him — because he bought the clubs somewhere else due to some weak spot in your manner of selling your services. However, be sure and let him know in a discreet and subtle manner that you have years of experience in fitting a person with clubs to his requirements and at the right price. Then go on and tell him that he can try several sets of your brand new clubs that are now resting in an eye-catching display in your shop without any obligation on his part. Do this, if possible, after he has told you that he has had a particularly bad round, or lost two bucks to Joe.

When he is on the practice tee trying out your brand new clubs don't hesitate to give him a pointer or two on his swing. This will help him hit the ball better and he will feel that the clubs have a lot to do with it.

If he says he likes a particular set, go ahead and work up to a sale. Tell him, then, and only then, what you actually think of his clubs. Tell him that you will apply whatever you can get for his clubs toward the price of the new clubs, "but they're an off brand, and I may not be able to get very much for them." He will feel that the store from which he bought the clubs gave him a royal going over when they sold him "those super duper golf clubs."

These few pointers will help bring some new business into your golf shop but they are not enough. The pro at the course has still other advantages over the downtown shop. For instance, everybody has a birthday. The live-wire at the club keeps a memorandum book. In this book he keeps all the pertinent facts of his members and their family, which includes the birth date. Every wife, husband, son, daughter, sweetheart, and some friends buy birthday presents. A note to the wife of your member telling her that her husband needs a new club, bag, or just balls,

and what member can't use golf balls? will divert some more business toward your shop.

Be sure to state in your letter that you carry the desired merchandise, quote prices, description, substitutes, etc. Don't overlook other days such as Father's and Mother's days, and of course, Christmas.

All this entails a lot of work but earning a living is work, especially in a competitive economy. The stores are always circularizing their patrons, bombarding them with various kinds of advertising. In some instances they even give free samples. To offset this you've got to keep your typewriter and mimeograph machine busy.

Appeal to man's esteem. Tactfully let him know if he is playing with obsolete clubs. You always must use discretion. When a member who needs a new set of clubs, and who is a hard nut to crack, comes into your shop, or you see him on the course, let him know that Bill Smith and Jim Jones have just bought new sets of clubs. Let him know how well they are playing with them, too.

Don't tell him that he needs a new set, that his are many years old and should be replaced with a new set. He knows all this and will consciously or unconsciously resent your telling him so.

He already knows that his clubs are old and your subtle darts will make him feel that Jim and Bill have nothing on him. If they can afford a new set, he can, too. The next time this guy comes into your shop pull a club from your display and say, "This is the set that Jim bought," and hand him the club. Once the merchandise is in his hands, he will begin to talk freely. From there on it's up to you. If he does not buy right on the spot remember his wife or his son or daughter may buy it as a gift.

I like to send members a mimeographed letter at least once a month. In this letter I include past events and results, future events and their attractions for the participating members, and odd happenings about the club for the past month. Along with such news I never fail to include at least one item about Bill Jones buying a new set of clubs and breaking 80-90- or 100 for the first time, or Alice Hackett taking golf seriously as evidenced by the improvement of her game after lessons.

### Watch Price Range

Pros lose sales to hardware, drug stores, etc., because they are too proud to put a few items of inexpensive merchandise into their shop. Even some extremely wealthy people are tremendously price

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## TEE OFF PARTY HONORS BEN



Tee Off Party in the Garden Room of the fashionable Hotel Bel Air especially honored Ben Hogan the night before the Los Angeles Open Golf Tourney held at the Riviera Country Club. Host was genial Don B. Burger, vice-pres. of the Bel Air corporation. More than 200 newspapermen and fellow golfers gathered to fete the fabulous Ben. Left to right, Jimmy Demaret, Ojai Valley Inn and Country Club, and host Don B. Burger, join Ben at one of the many tables laden with food.

## MERCHANDISING FOR PROS

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conscious. They buy on price alone. Usually, however, most of these buyers will not sacrifice quality for price if a rational explanation is given to them on why they should buy quality rather than price. But keep merchandise for these customers in your shop. To convert these buyers, the salesman must know all about grips, shafts, heads, weights, balance, design and the other components of a golf club.

How about the golf bags? Do you and your assistants know their quality, manufacture, strong and weak points? And the golf balls? coverings, markings, winding, centers, etc.? You can be sure that the downtown stores do all they can to get this information into the hands of their salesmen. You, as an old hand at the golf business, should know ten times as much about your merchandise as the downtown store salesman. Give some of this knowledge to your assistants and your shop should hum with sales.

Further, do not forget to let your members know that you perform one hundred and one services for them that no downtown store does. You take their telephone messages, arrange matches, run their tournaments, get them caddies, introduce them about the club, listen to

their complaints, and do your best to arrange things the way they like them. Why, shucks, you even close their car windows when unexpected showers arrive and they are out playing, or sitting in the club house near a nice warm fire playing pinochle, or is it Canasta?

### The Net Income Picture

While I am at it, I might as well add a word of caution. Many pros take jobs without a salary, retainer, from the club in the mistaken idea that they can live by playing golf. Even the smallest golf shop requires two persons: the pro to give lessons, make sales, etc., and an assistant to clean clubs, train caddies, and do the odd jobs about the shop. The shop probably is open seven days every week, usually at least twelve hours of each day. No man today wants to work 84 hours a week. Breaking this down for two men leaves an average work week of 42 hours. To pay a living wage to two men from sales alone, requires sales totaling at least \$18,000 a year. Not many shops do this amount of business.

Therefore, a pro must have a salary in direct relation to the amount of sales and to the value of his services to the club. Unless this policy is followed the pro becomes dissatisfied, the members become dissatisfied, and disharmony will prevail at the club. Sooner or later the pro resigns and the club is left with the feeling that pros as a whole are not very worthy. The dissatisfied pro meantime has broadcast his tribulations to the wholesale golf salesmen, the sporting goods houses, and to the other members of his profession. The sum of the whole thing is that the club is blighted with an unfair appraisal by the pro and the pro is blasted unfairly by the club.

Anyone can see from this that the club thought it was making a smart move when it hired a pro who was willing to accept a position without guarantee from the club.

The pro undoubtedly took this job on these terms because he was in dire straits and badly needed a job. To avoid this unpleasantness there must be genuine cooperation between the club and the pro.

The club paying a retainer to a pro is in a better position to demand more, and will get more, from its pro. The pro will be in a better position to enthusiastically serve the members with expert thoroughness no downtown store can offer. Here, then, are a few suggestions that should, and will, contribute to the happiness of the pro businessman, to the golfer who really wants to enjoy his golf, and to the club that wants a congenial atmosphere in and about its golf shop.