

# Adjust to New Conditions to Keep Pros in Market Lead

By HERB GRAFFIS

In keeping a fairly close watch on retailing operations as reported in the sales and advertising magazines I get the conviction that pro merchandising compares very well with the merchandising of smaller retailers in other fields.

Pro credit also compares favorably with that of other smaller retailers. Credit, of course, is based on ability as well as integrity. The pro can be 100 per cent honest but if he is deficient in business ability—or if his club isn't much as a market—chances are his credit won't be up to standard. So he's got to develop his business ability, increase activity and buying at his club and take advantage of discounts or he won't register up to the average of the pro business field.

If his credit isn't good his chances for getting a better job aren't any too hot. Club officials may not know a lot about appraising some of the qualifications a first class pro should have but the officials generally know all there is to know about credit rating as a mark of business ability.

When GOLFDOM started, more than 23 years ago, we began making a strong point of improving pro credit. Some of those pioneer Scotch and homebred pros were fundamentally thrifty and good canny businessmen. Their credit was tops. Others depended too much on the manufacturing competitive situation for financing and dangerously liberal credit. It took years, and volumes of educational material in GOLFDOM, to correct the credit picture and bring it up to its present satisfactory status.

## Credit Tighter Now

One thing that improved pro credit was the unwillingness of manufacturers to allow themselves to be played against each other. One manufacturer might be easy with credit and his goods, when sold by a pro, helped to pay what the pro owed to another manufacturer who had a tough, smart credit manager. The pro couldn't be blamed too much for taking advantage of the soft touch but the practice backfired on all pros by making the quick cash business of the big stores desirable to manufacturers. That credit laxity also backfired on pros when pro merchandise unsold came back to manufacturers and was unloaded as distress goods through stores.

Looking back at that phase of golf merchandising history it's plain to see

that the stores got big in the golf business because some pros didn't know their business.

What sold best in the stores was the merchandise for which the pros had built up consumer acceptance. On other golf merchandise the stores have had to spend fortunes in advertising and have operated at narrower margins to sell to the market. A rather large part of the store market consists of golfers who haven't got pro shop services available at all, let alone conveniently and attractively available.

## Supply Oft Exceeds Demand

Fundamentally, what makes golf merchandising demand smart work is that the manufacturing capacity for golf goods normally exceeds the market demand. That situation isn't unique in golf. This year the club sales situation was abnormal due to popular new models of irons and a prolonged strike at one of the large shaft maker's plant. Those circumstances always call for a test of real merchandising brains and effort. Tough tests are always going to keep coming up. Pro golf went through one of these deals when the steel shafts displaced wood. There's some experimenting now with a synthetic shaft but it looks long enough away to have the switch, if any, accomplished without threat of a violent disruption in golf club marketing. There was a slight disturbance in pro shops—and far more among manufacturers—when the American golf ball standard was changed. But generally the annual changes in models, of clubs particularly, are simply the sort of switches that all dealers in fashion goods must expect.

Where the pro gets caught short is in having any stock left over as his season ends. The stores have a wide and somewhat indiscriminating field of customers who buy largely on price. The stores are accustomed to cutting prices to convert merchandise into cash. The pros aren't. The pro is inclined to figure that if he sells a customer a set of clubs at a reduced price at the end of a season he's beating himself out of the sale he might make at standard price to the same buyer when next year's models come in. He also figures that if he sells a set of clubs to a member at the start of a season and a similar set of clubs at a lower price four months later, the first buyer is going to



Roy Owen lets shoppers know that he guarantees to meet any price competition and any terms. A sign prominent in his shop at Hillcrest CC, Boise, Ida., keeps possible customers from straying to buy.

be sore. Four months' use of the clubs ought to be worth some premium to the first buyer, but private club members often are unreasonable.

#### Golfers Expect Top Service

However the private club pro merchandising situation is by no means the sole factor governing pro policy. Players at public or privately-owned fee courses now are expecting pro sales service up to private club standard and prices that meet the store standard. One of the great achievements of pro businessmen is that they're giving the pay-as-you-play golfers that combination.

Pros, manufacturers and city recreation department officials could well study the operations of Paul Scott at Griffith Park, Los Angeles, as an example of pro department business conducted as a public service. There are increasing examples of public and semi-public courses where the pros are given a profit incentive for drawing customers to the courses and serving them in a way that means considerably more net to the municipality, or the course private owner, than to the pro himself.

The fee course owners, having learned the hard way that they get in pro service just what they pay for, have been quicker to open up earning opportunities for pros than most public course controlling bodies. In the latter cases there is an element of jealousy, a tradition of salaries frozen at levels lower than in private enterprise, and political fixing that often retards the

development of pro department service to the degree the public could have.

Across the country from Scott is Spencer Murphy at an exclusive private club where Murphy has to apply different methods to a different type of clientele and in his shop can meet the competition of the top level specialty shops. Scott and Murphy illustrate the Number One point in pro merchandising—Know your own market, intimately and accurately and apply to it ALL the merchandising fundamentals in ways that fit. What may go at one club won't work at another club a half a mile down the road. But the same basic policies with variations in application, work out successfully.

#### Outsmarting Competition

The pros are closer to their customers than the stores are. If a pro allows himself to be outsmarted by the stores his job is to discover how and why he was outsmarted and to correct that deficiency. Complaining will get him nowhere.

The pros around Portland, Ore., have been working successfully in a market development campaign that stores can't copy. To each monthly pro-amateur event the Portland district pros bring reconditioned used sets of clubs they've taken as trade-ins. The sets of woods and irons have the pro owners' identification by numbers on tags. Prices are given on tags. Each pro is limited to bringing three sets of clubs to each event.

The reconditioned clubs sold at reduced prices go not only to amateurs contesting in the prom-am events but draw shoppers who don't happen to be playing. If the clubs are sold the pro owner gets the money. If not, he takes them home. The bargain clubs are well displayed.

Portland pros have found that the cooperative enterprise has helped new club sales by providing a market for trade-ins and has supplied people in lower income brackets with unbeatable bargains in clubs. The over-all result has been to show golfers in the district that good clubs at all prices can be obtained from pros.

The used club deal is getting to be the same sort of a problem to many pros as the used car problem is to automobile dealers. There was a good suggestion on the back of admission tickets to the National Open at Merion. It read: "Be a pal to a beginner. Your discarded equipment will help start a worthy boy or girl in 'The Game of a Lifetime.'" But too seldom is used equipment donated to kids. In some instances pros have exhibited in their shops cut-down clubs for smaller kids they've made from discarded clubs and have taken off the trade-in market some clubs at an allowance which is represented by the time used in cutting down the clubs. But the scarcity of assistants qualified to do even this sort of clubmaking has kept that good showmanship and market development sharply restricted.

#### Tell Your Story

Although the trade-in arrangement and the time-payment deal can help merchandising at some clubs when applied with good judgment by the pro, the matter of acquainting the members or the non-mem-

ber golfing public with the pro shop's capacity for meeting any price requirement with pro-approved playing equipment can't be left on an individual contact basis. Everybody who might come into the shop should be informed that the pro is in a position to be top man in any competitive price situation.

Not enough of this has been done in pro shop merchandising.

Roy Owen, pro at Hillcrest CC, Boise, Ida., has a pro shop sign that gets all prospective buyers of golf equipment to "Stop, Look and Listen" and generally has them buying from Roy, according to Bob King, MacGregor Golf's Pacific Northwest representative.

The Owen sign, attractively lettered and prominently displayed in his shop, reads:

"I will guarantee that I can supply you with any type of golf club, bag, ball or other golf merchandise at a price as low or lower than you would pay in any store. My merchandise is the best available and is fair-traded. I depend on your business for my livelihood.

"Your satisfaction is completely guaranteed and you can buy on terms as well as cash.

"Let me prove to you that your pro can handle all your golf needs."

Owen is only one of hundreds of representative pro merchants who is solving his competitive problem by telling his story to his prospective buyers, and not hoping for a solution to be dropped into his lap. His typical case explains why, with more golfers and with more store competition, the pro command of the dollar volume of the golf market is getting stronger.

## USGA COMPETITIONS FOR 1951

**Walker Cup Match:** May 11 and 12 at Birkdale Golf Club, Birkdale, Southport, England. Men's amateur teams, Great Britain vs. United States.

(Dates entries close mean last dates for application to reach USGA office, 73 E. 57th St. New York 22, N.Y., except in the case of the Amateur Public Links Championship. For possible exceptions in dates of Sectional Qualifying Rounds, see entry forms.)

Championship	Entries Close	Sectional Qualifying Rounds	Championship Dates	Venue
Open	May 21	June 4	June 14-15-16	Oakland Hills C. C., Birmingham, Mich.
Amat. Public Links	*June 1	**June 17 to 23	Team: July 7 Indiv.: July 9-14	(not determined)
Junior Amateur	July 2	July 17	July 25-28	Univ. of Illinois, Champaign, Ill.
Girls' Junior	July 30	—	August 13-17	(not determined)
Women's Amateur	July 23	Aug. 7-8	August 20-25	Town and Country C., St. Paul, Minn.
Amateur	August 13	August 28	Sept. 10-15	Saucon Valley C. C., Bethlehem, Pa.

\*Entries close with Sectional Qualifying Chairmen. \*\*Exact date in each Section to be fixed by Sectional Chairmen.