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Make It Easy to Buy in the Pro Shop

By HERB GRAFFIS

One of the big, nationally known men's stores has suffered more of a slump in volume than could be regarded as normal during the past six months. To most men who go into the place the store looks attractive and shows class. But the men's stores on competitive corners have a newer look and that's cutting deeply into the older store's business.

Pros talk about competition with stores but don't often realize that the competition between stores, even for golf business, is generally a whole lot keener than the competition between stores and the pros. So the pro, in studying how to keep his business in a dominating position, can well look to what the stores are being compelled to do in beating neighboring competition.

One selling point that shows the pros in good shape was brought out in an address by Prof. Malcolm P. McNair, recently appointed to the Lincoln Filene professorship of retailing at Harvard University. Prof. McNair stressed the "self-service" idea and said that the department store of the future will be operated like a super-market on the self-service plan.

Instead of the present idea of department stores with long counters, the department store of the future, said Prof. McNair, will have rows of open fixtures to show the full range of stock to advantage. There will be attractive packaging and instead of sales people spending much of their time in idleness there will be "customers' advisers" around the floor. When items desired have been selected the customer will pay or charge the bill and be on the way.

Easy for Buyer

Best of the pro shops already are pretty much on the super-service basic idea with facilities arranged to make it easy for the customer to buy. The reason for this is plain. At the golf club, private or public, the customer comes into the shop to buy

rather than to be sold. At the private club, particularly, the pro has to be careful not to accent selling or he'll run the risk of arousing member sales resistance and resentment of high-pressure selling. Consequently the best pro merchants have gone strong on making it easy to buy.

Shop arrangement and display has to be primarily for making buying easy. The first step in making buying easy and painless is to have the merchandise so attractively, conspicuously and conveniently displayed the potential buyer gets a desire that is pleasantly satisfied only when his money passes into the pro's hands.

Most pros can learn more about shop display than they ever realized was to be known if they'll talk things over with a department store display man. What this specialist does in arranging merchandise in windows and departments magnetizes money. One of the best sessions I ever witnessed at a sectional PGA meeting was the talk and demonstration put on by an Indianapolis department store display manager and members of his staff at the 1949 spring meeting of the Indiana section. At the Indiana meeting this spring several pros told me that what these experts had told them about display has meant considerable sales increases in their shops.

Another thing that pros can learn from the store men is the location of merchandise with respect to the channels of traffic through the shop.

Al Zimmerman, Alderwood CC pro, touched upon this point in an article in April GOLF DOM. Al urged that architects design pro shops so traffic on the way to the first tee would enter one door of a pro shop, go through the shop and proceed to the tee through the second door. Considering that the majority of pro shops are architectural afterthoughts and that neither club officials or architects often have a clear idea of the

importance of pro shop service in adding to players' pleasure, it'll probably be a long time before this two-door idea is used as much as it should be.

In the meanwhile, though, the pro will have to solve the problem of arranging his showings of merchandise in a way that gives his stock highest sales exposure. He knows that people are coming into his shop more often to buy balls than to buy anything else. So what do you see in many pro shop layouts? The ball counter is very handy when the customer enters. Therefore the customer buys the balls he wants and gets out without much exposure to other merchandise in the shop.

The chain food store layouts have the meat department to the back of the store for the simple reason that meat is the food bought most often. The shopper coming into the store for meat walks past counters and shelves on which there are other foods which the store management wants to bring to the attention of the possible buyer.

In the case of the drug store the tobacco and candy stocks are near the door because the cashier is located there and a lot of the small change can be held by the store in exchange for cigarettes, candy, chewing gum or cigars. Furthermore, the drug store traffic and patronage is such that if a man wants to buy cigarettes he isn't going back into the store, for a few doors away there is a competing store with the cigarettes on sale at a location which makes shopping easy. Subconsciously the shopper spends where it's easiest for him or her to spend money.

Prof. McNair, in his address, said it's an "outworn myth" that women look upon shopping as great sport. They, too, want their shopping to be easy. Stores that get most of women's business makes shopping easy. Pros wives probably did more to modernize pro merchandising than the pros themselves did, for the simple reason that the wives made more of a study of shops and shopping.

This feminine influence was especially powerful and valuable during the war when pros were away in war service and their wives kept pro shops operating on an emergency basis. The places that the war wives operated were cleaned and brightened and the apparel business that had to be built up, when golf playing equipment was almost impossible to get, was really moved into good volume. The wives put the apparel items out on tables and counters so shoppers could closely examine the material and workmanship without having to ask to have the items handed to them for inspection. Now that's what almost every well operated pro shop does. The cellophane wrappers keep the

shirts clean and make it easy for the customer to get the garments in his—or her—hands.

Brightness Builds Business

The marked trend toward vividly colored golf apparel has featured golf merchandising the past two years. Headware and shirts this year are gaudier than ever before. The reason is plain enough; golf's an outdoor game and outdoors is bright.

Yet consider the dark colors and bad lighting in many pro shops. In gloomy stage settings golf merchandise doesn't look enough "at home" to promote the buying urge. The possible buyer instinctively thinks of golf merchandise as being associated with sunshine. When the merchandise is shown under rather dreary conditions an unnecessary exertion of imagination is required to make the golf stuff appealing. Buying is made harder than it should be.

It's amazing that there should be dark pro shops when the local electric company generally has volumes of material and expert service to survey the situation and make recommendations for correct lighting.

No matter how often a pro or his assistant keeps sweeping and dusting a poorly lighted shop it always looks somewhat dirty. The merchandise doesn't seem to be in the same class as that of a well lighted store. That's one of the explanations of pros not being able to move some items that are exceptionally good buys and better value than comparable items in downtown displays.

There's another factor about pro shop lighting that has nothing to do with display but may have plenty to do with profits. Lighting seldom is used enough as burglar protection at pro shops. A few cents per night spent for keeping a shop lit can be effective burglar insurance.

Pro's Biggest Advantage

A prominent, highly successful store man recently told me that he wondered why the pro's percentage of golf market volume wasn't even bigger than it is because the pro has the greatest advantage in retailing; shop location at point of need and use.

This merchandising authority went into detail:

"Buying golf goods at a store requires the buyer going out of his habitual route in his day's work. It's work that he wouldn't do if he didn't happen to be eagerly interested in a game. When he buys at a store there's a delay between his purchase and use; much longer than between purchase and use of an item he might buy at a pro shop. If the purchase isn't satisfactory he can get immediate adjustment and personal attention from the boss at a pro shop. He can even try



AT ILLINOIS PGA ANNUAL SPRING SESSION

Largest spring meeting Illinois PGA ever held, at Morrison hotel, Chicago, April 10, concluded instruction clinic and business education sessions with dinner at which above line-up gave voice to cheering words. L to R—Matt Niessen, Herb Graffis, Stanley Van Dyk (pres., Chicago Dist. GA.); John Ames, chmn., Tournament Comm., USGA; Errie Ball, William Gordon, pres., Illinois PGA; Geo. S. May, Jerome Bowes, pres., Western GA; Maynard G. (Scotty) Fessenden, and Fred Barks.

clubs right outside a pro shop before he makes up his mind to buy.

"If the pro is a good merchant, by his buying, his pricing and his advertising he can do anything a competing store can do in offering a deal to the consumer, although in plenty of instances the competing store's buying volume is so much larger than that of the individual pro the store should have a price edge on the pro.

"But the stores, which actually have a serious handicap of being located out of the way for the golfing shopper, can attribute about as much of their golf volume to pro errors of omission in merchandising as the stores can attribute to their own advertising, display and merchandising methods.

"As an example: Last Christmas we had an unusually large business in bright colored nylon golf bags. Our selling cost was fairly high because we worked advertising strong in pushing these bags as Christmas gifts. I've been playing golf for years and I know many pros around here. And I'd say that about 80% of our Christmas business in those bags was secured simply because pros who are pretty good merchants simply weren't on the job.

"What happened was that they went on winter vacations or jobs before they had really given their market a good going over for Christmas gift business. The pro sends out one ad or a letter, then is inclined to stop. He doesn't figure what the possible sales will justify in advertising expense. Unless we have some great price offering and a limited amount of the merchandise, we keep hitting the possible buyers from every angle.

"In the case of these bags they were something fairly new. The tournament pros had been using them so the market had been opened. The pros should have swept the market in a new style of bag. Good bags last so long the pro has to keep his eyes open for style changes in order to keep his volume up. When a golfer buys a new set of woods and/or irons and puts them in an old bag, the pro has missed a great chance to sell and he can't excuse himself by saying that the customer ran out of money while buying the clubs.

In this instance of our big volume of bags the pros missed pressing their advantage—the ease of buying at their shop."

This retailing expert's comment hit hard but it didn't strike all pros. I've noticed during the past year or so more and more pros are displaying new sets of clubs in new bags in their shops instead of having all the clubs and all the bags in separate displays. The tie-up showing has helped make more sales.

If you can recall pro shops of 30 years ago you may remember that many of them got about 100% of the members' business in anything the pro shop had for sale. And by today's standards a lot of those shops weren't much to look at. But they did have one great point. Everything they had to sell was right out where it was easy to buy. Now with a bigger variety of golf merchandise to sell it's a problem to have the goods displayed so the potential customers can see what you've got for them and how easy it is to buy.

How successfully that problem is solved determines the profit of the pro shop.