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# Pros Earn Experts' Respect As First Class Merchants

By HERB GRAFFIS

Probably most professionals don't realize they are responsible for one of the most interesting and important developments in retail merchandising in the post-war era. All they think about is serving their players and making money and holding their jobs by this service. The fact that shop merchandising has grown to be by far the largest source of pro income possibly isn't as surprising to pros as it is to other retailers who sell apparel, for instance, to golfers.

I've talked with many authorities in retail merchandising who have expressed amazement at the way pros have been building sales volume. The other retailers say the pro displays are not often anywhere near as attractive as displays at first class retailing establishments but the location of the pro's store, his function as a supply station for golfers, the charge account set-up at private clubs, and the pro's growing sagacity as a buyer, are putting him in a class with the most successful retailers.

As these authorities, most of them golfers, talk about the pro it's struck me that very few of them have mentioned the pro's resourcefulness. Time after time I've seen cases of pros being up against tough competitive situations and win out because they learned how to roll with the punch.

## Pros Out-Smart Competition

It's been a hard lesson to learn. Before World War II pros usually were complaining about store competition and blamed it on the manufacturers. Then the pros began thinking how they could out-smart other retail competition and extend the pro market. It dawned on them that there were many golfers who played at courses where there were no pros, or pros who were not alertly and aggressively on the job, and that golf

merchandise was going to be sold to players at those courses.

The next step in thinking was easy. It was simply the step of a pro doing everything he could think of to make sure that he sold pretty near 100 per cent of what was used by those who played at his course. That problem was primarily his, rather than the manufacturers'.

Now let's review what competent businessmen in pro golf have done to come close to getting 100 per cent results in supplying their members.

Consider the case of Max Elbin at Burning Tree Club in the Washington, D. C. district. Elbin is fundamentally a merchant of service.

## Club-selling by Elbin

The clubs of his members probably are newer than those you'll see at most other first-class clubs. Clubs that are not of the more recent models and don't fit the swings that have been changed by a few years are given by some members to their sons, or used by members as travel sets—or if the clubs are pretty much out of date and used they're sent to the local Naval hospital and warmly welcomed there.

That's the result of a helpful campaign of education Elbin has conducted. It isn't the result of any strong sales pressure when a member looks like he might be a customer for a new set.

Once in a while Max will take a trade-in set when it can be used as a good guest set for visitors to Burning Tree. There's another indication of Elbin's savvy as a merchant; the members' guests are given such treatment that they comment favorably to their hosts.

Guests—or their hosts—don't mind paying a \$2 rental fee if the rented clubs are good. Max usually keeps on hand a

rental set of each prominent manufacturer's clubs so the guests may be able to play with the same sort of clubs they use at home.

### **Treating Guests Right**

Elbin is among many smart pro businessmen who take pains to see that guests get pro department treatment that is of the same considerate standard the guest would receive were he in the home of his host. It makes the guest and the host feel good, and it's very good business for Max.

Even a little thing like having a guest's clubs cleaned is something that often brings favorable comment and makes the host realize the pro department at his club is an eager and competent exponent of hospitality.

When there's cut-price competition in town that might be serious enough to have some effect on Elbin's members he meets it by simply having a small sign "Special This Weekend" (and the price) put on clubs that are the same or similar to those on which the price is being cut. He does this rather than hold out for the standard price on clubs that have been slow-moving and which are to be made out of date by newer models.

On days when weather is threatening Max moves his rainwear into a display spot in his shop where the items are bound to catch the eyes of all who enter.

### **Doesn't Carry Over Stock**

And when summer nears its end Max reduces prices on some shirts and headwear so he won't be holding stock over the winter and his members will figure they might as well take advantage of the lowered prices instead of making whatever they have last the year out.

Other retailers say that the pro's location at a club gives the pro a selling advantage that's hard to beat, but the pro knows that there is a lot of difference in volume represented by the variations in locations of a pro shop. A shop that isn't on the most convenient walk between the locker-room and the first tee isn't convenient for the member, consequently isn't the best sales place for the pro.

Vic Soitz is up against that handicap at Edgewood Valley CC (Chicago dist.). So to serve his members Vic had an attractively displayed stock of golf merchandise that's liable to be forgotten by the potential buyer, wheeled to the first tee on weekends. The members appreciate that as a service, and to Soitz it's a considerable addition to the sales volume.

### **Pros Advertise Effectively**

Where the other retailer sometimes gets the edge over the pro is in advertising, but here again you'll see that many pros are canny advertisers. You can look over

the following two letters that Soitz sends the Edgewood Valley members as examples of effective advertising by professionals.

With costs of making clubs up, the selling prices naturally have some people looking around to see where they can get clubs "wholesale." Soitz protects his members and himself against that situation by this letter:

Dear Club Member:

Every merchant suffers somewhat from the "I-can-buy-it-wholesale" attitude of his customers.

I don't blame any man for wanting to buy something as cheaply as he can. But nevertheless, it has been proven time after time that buying clubs wholesale is mistaken economy.

A golf club that is not properly fitted to you is expensive at any price.

After all, wholesalers are not golf professionals, and they do not know how to fit the clubs to the player. All they do is sell you a club.

I take great pride in the careful selection of golf equipment for my members. I place a value on my ability to do this, gained by my knowledge of the game itself. My prices are fair. I sell at regular retail list prices, but when I sell a club it is the right club expertly fitted to the man or woman who buys it. Such a club is worth every cent I charge for it.

In other words, I am trying to point out to you that the price of golf clubs doesn't determine their value to you. In the end, the golfer spends more money and will probably be quite dissatisfied if he buys golf clubs at random.

Don't walk out on the first tee under a handicap of several strokes because of a misfitted club. "Go to your pro. He knows."

### **Gets Into Homes**

Another sales advantage the pro has — and which the vigilant pro business man uses discreetly—is that of being able to get to the member in his home.

At the start of the season Soitz sent to his members a letter that not only clearly established his sales policy but got him a large volume of early season apparel business.

Here is the letter:

Dear Member:

I hope you will take a few minutes after dinner at home to read this letter. You see, I mailed it to your home instead of your office, and had a hunch you would read it more thoroughly. It has to do with golf merchandise.

This year I'm going to try to establish fair prices on all wearing apparel, and to

try to get away from the idea of "I-can-buy-it-wholesale" attitude of my customers. I have decided not to carry any Tee shirts, socks, dress shirts that after one good washing the waste basket has them. I have selected the best that money can buy, and am told that after a few washings they will stand up.

I don't have too many wool shirts in stock as you know most of the wool has gone to war. They now have cotton to take its place, and believe me they look good with some guarantee after so many washings. They come in solid colors, stripes, pull-overs, and various knitted types. The prices range from \$3.50 and up.

As for caps, hats and so on, here are some ideas as to what they are wearing. In California the rage is the "umbrella" hat and though it looks like an umbrella, it is tops. To my mind, if it looks funny it must be good. Various colors and shapes. In Florida it is white caps, visors, and some knit in colors.

You know I have shoes, umbrellas, golf rubbers, and the rest of golf merchandise, but this letter is just a reminder to let you know that the new wearing apparel has arrived, and suggest you do come in and inspect it before the season begins. You see I have no other way of telling you of this merchandise, so letters will be coming your way often when my new equipment arrives.

I want you to know I take great pride in the careful selection of golf equipment for my members. I place a value on my ability to do this, gained by my knowledge of the game itself. My prices are fair, and I sell at regular list prices.

The "quickies"—the bargains that keep the members reminded that Soitz has something that warrants a visit to the pro shop, are advertised by postcards. These postcards are highly profitable advertising in disposing of the merchandise, and in getting people into his shop where they'll probably see something else they want to buy.

A couple of his postcards:

#### EDGEWOOD VALLEY COUNTRY CLUB

Dear Member:

The first week in August is "Bargain Week" on Golf Bags. I will give you a 20% discount on any bag in the shop.

Come in and look them over.

Vic Soitz

Pro Shop

#### EDGEWOOD VALLEY COUNTRY CLUB

Dear Member:

Here is a buy for you. All White Pussy Foot Golf Hose — were \$1.00 Pair — ON SALE this month 3 for \$2.25.

PRO SHOP

## USGA Reminds Amateurs To Be Amateurs

USGA issued on July 24 a press release enclosing a copy of a memorandum from James W. Walker, chmn., Amateur Status and Conduct Committee, which had been sent to all entrants for the 1952 Amateur and Women's championships.

A copy of the rules of amateur status and a copy of Eugene G. Grace's talk at a dinner to contestants, officials and press prior to the 1951 National Amateur, also were sent 1952 entrants and the press.

The "memo to entrants" read:

"Attention is called to the fact that the Rules of Amateur Status prohibit an amateur golfer from:

"1. Accepting without appropriate payment golf balls, clubs or other golf merchandise from anyone dealing in golf merchandise.

"2. Accepting expenses, in money or otherwise, in connection with a golf competition or exhibition. (Note—The Rules permit certain exceptions for specific events.)

"Observance of all Rules of Amateur Status is, in last analysis, up to the honesty of the individual player. The same honesty is involved in observing these Rules off the course as in returning a right score on the course.

"The USGA is not a police organization. Golf is not the sort of activity that requires a police organization.

"However, when the USGA receives concrete evidence of violations, it does not hesitate to take positive action. Unfortunately, certain players are at present under suspicion.

"The Association bespeaks your cooperation in upholding the Definition of an Amateur Golfers, as follows:

"An amateur golfer is one who plays the game solely as a non-remunerative or non-profit-making sport."

"The good name of golf and the good fun of golf are entirely within the keeping of the players, and the players alone."

## New Edition of European Golf Guide Issued

European Annual Golf Guide, giving names, locations, officials, operating personnel, fees and data on courses in continental Europe and Africa, recently was published in the 1952 edition by Paris-Vendome, Paris 1. Price is approximately \$3. It's the only complete directory of continental European courses. This year's edition shows that golf on the continent and at the Mediterranean and African resorts has fully recovered from World War II and is making a strong bid for American tourist play.