

Sales Ideas

Service is still the pro's best friend, but he's starting to copy some of the tricks used by downtown department stores



PROS, reporting on the ideas they used in 1958 to increase sales, reaffirmed the old belief that so far as the golf shop is concerned, there is no gimmick that quite matches service. Yet, as you will note in the comments below, there was something of an awakening to the realization that the pro shop operator, if he is to maintain volume and profits, has to start meeting the downtown merchant on the latter's home ground. This is by holding occasional sales, introducing certain types of merchandise with special prices and promotion and, in general, copying some of the rather radical merchandising methods the department store people have found so successful in the past few years.

Here is what eight pros had to say about their sales efforts for 1958:

Joe Brown, Des Moines (Ia.) CC — There are at least two dozen things that a pro handles that give him a strong sales talking point. I concentrate on them one at a time, being rather careful not to push several items in one sales pitch to the golfer. If you do the latter, it either bewilders him or makes him distrustful of your methods. Let's look at alpaca sweaters, for example. Why not push them for one week. It's amazing what can happen. One player buys one and tells a friend. Before long you have sold a half dozen. The following week you may want to concentrate on golf shoes. There's usually one good, new selling feature about shoes. Play it up — do nothing but talk about it. It's surprising how many people will become interested and buy.

Gene Conway, Elks CC, Elkhart, Ind. — Many pros may not believe it, but re-

straint can be an excellent selling tool. This is particularly true where something like clubs or shoes have to be fitted. You want to give the person a perfect fit, but if you don't have his size in stock there is still that impulse to make a sale. That's where restraint comes in. Insist that he wait until the proper size can be ordered and received. If you do that often enough it instills confidence in your members. They keep coming back and buying because they are sure that you are not going to pawn off just anything on them. In my time, I have refused many times to sell clubs out of stock even though golfers insisted they had to have them that day. Occasionally, someone will become downright irked with you when you refuse to sell him ill-fitting clubs or shoes, but sooner or later he comes back to thank you for holding off until you can get the right merchandise.

Charlie Grant, Barrington (Ill.) CC — Perhaps many pros don't yet recognize it, but the profit margin in pro golf is coming from sales to women. I'm fortunate in having a wife who knows as much about my business as I do. We arrange for her to play golf with every woman in the club some time during the season. She, of course, doesn't try to sell any merchandise on the strength of playing with women members, but it does us a lot of good. It creates all kinds of goodwill, more than if my wife just worked in the shop and had nothing more than a speaking acquaintanceship with our women players. Playing together creates real friendliness. My wife's playing partners buy from her not from a sense of obligation, but because of this friendliness.

Charlie Petrino, Brooklawn CC, Bridgeport, Conn. — I feel that pros make a mistake if they don't let the members know that their livelihood depends upon the members' patronage. This is nothing to be ashamed of. Henry Ford II does this in advertising his automobiles.

But with this bid for patronage the pros assume obligations to provide the very best in merchandise and service. If you want the former and are not willing to give the latter, then you should get into some other field.

A short time ago, I had quite a discussion with one of my members about the club situation. I told him that if he had purchased his clubs at a downtown store I wouldn't feel as inclined to give him the benefit of my services than if he had bought them from me. At first he didn't agree. But finally he saw it my way when he realized that, as an insurance agent, he would be more willing to give help and advice to one of his policyholders than to someone who had bought his insurance through another agency.

We can't ram the patronage obligation theme down the throats of our members, but we can let them know in a tactful and diplomatic way that we expect some if not all of their business. Selling them this idea is as important as standing behind a counter and selling them golf balls and putters.

Jack Wayne, Credit Island GC, Davenport, Iowa — With downtown department stores coming along with sales about every two weeks, the buying public has been educated to expect bargains. It must be the solution because department store sales have been increasing steadily for the past few years. In our business, I think

we have no choice but to do the same thing. All through 1958 I ran weekend specials. They went over big. Golfers who never came into the shop before came in for the specials. Occasionally, I sold them something that wasn't on sale. That's where the real profit was.

But there can be a pitfall to special sales. If you overstock in anticipation of holding them, you can get stuck. You have to realize that your markup is considerably reduced when you offer goods at sale prices. Ordinarily, if you don't move at least 75 or 80 per cent of the overstocked merchandise, you'll find that you are working for nothing. My advice is not to go overboard on this kind of merchandising.

Jim McDonald, Randolph GC, Tucson, Ariz. — There is no substitute for service at a golf club. In fact, if you are going to operate at a profit, you have to service them to death. But it can work wonders. A few years ago, I was at a club which never had a pro before. A local sporting goods store sold the members all their equipment. I had to break the members of a long, ingrained habit of going downtown and buying all their golfing articles. The first year was tough, but I made up my mind that I was going to give the players service, even if it killed me. Toward the end of the season things started to pick up. In my second year there, I really broke the ice. Even though the club was small, my club and ball sales were unusually large. I used no gimmick whatever, but I really gave the members what they wanted.

Monte F. Norcross, Metuchen (N. J.) G & CC — After being around this game for a few years, I have come to the conclusion that we have to run a pro shop similar to the way they run a department store. We occasionally have to move out slow-selling merchandise by holding sales. I haven't tried the loss-leader idea, but special introductory offers have brought fine returns for me. I recommend them for the more perishable items such as socks, gloves, etc., but not for such things as clubs, bags, etc. By copying the department store methods, I have increased my volume by about 30 per cent in the last two years.

Tony G. Jaronik, Bonnie Brooks CC, Waukegan, Ill. — I really have no new ideas to offer. I'd rather depend on an old one, that while it may sound shopworn,
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TROUBLE FREE! RENTAL CART SERVICE

We furnish you all you need on rental share basis. No investment for you! We deliver and service carts regularly and keep them in good repair—FREE. Clubs not held responsible for damages, theft or breakage.

CADDY-ROLL RENTAL SERVICE

Three Rivers, Michigan

Cheap Pool Point Is Expensive

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Your members will be more inclined to sing in the showers (and lockerrooms) if they don't have to look at "practically new" paint that has gone to pot because of steam, dampness and mildew. So many people think that they have to accept discolored and peeling paint and bare patches of plaster. It just isn't so. A paint designed to stand up to these expensive nuisances will keep its clean, enamel finish for many years without repainting. Furthermore, it will protect the plaster beneath it from breaking down. As you probably know, once moisture gets at plaster, the plaster begins to lose strength. A good shower room paint keeps moisture away from plaster.

Don't use paint left over from your pool. Get a paint made especially for shower and locker room ceilings, walls and floors. We think you'll find a chlorinated natural rubberbase paint will be the best answer to this problem.

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bring fine returns if it is practiced. It amounts to this: Go out of your way to give good service and you'll build up a fine reputation through a chain reaction among your players. Once the reputation is established, you can't help but continue to increase sales, provided, of course, you keep up the kind of service your members have become accustomed to. I had quite a bit of success in 1958 in club sales. Once again, I can't claim that I did anything that hasn't been done before. I stressed that the golfer can only be properly fitted in a pro shop; I encouraged everyone interested in buying new clubs to give them

a thorough test on the practice fairway before buying; I made as liberal an allowance as economically feasible on trade-in clubs.

Grau's Answers

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Common Bermuda Infestation

Q.—I would like to know what can be done about Bermudagrass in our greens. We have Colonial and creeping bent in the greens. Bermuda was planted in fairways and it has spread to the greens. Now that I have been promoted to the No. 1 man I would like to do something about this problem. (Calif.)

A. If the greens are heavily infested you would do well to rebuild. In this process the greens should be torn up, necessary architectural changes made, sand (if needed) added, drainage corrected, brought to grade and soil sterilized to kill all existing vegetation. You have a choice between Dowfume and Vapam. Sterilize a collar at least 6-ft. wide around the putting surface. As soon as the green is ready to plant, add necessary nutrients and replant. You may choose from among these three bents: Cohansey, Old Orchard, Penncross. These bents are stronger and more resistant to Bermuda invasion than Colonial. Plant the bent 3 ft. beyond the putting surface. For the remaining 3 ft. you may plant one of the very fine Bermudas which resist the spread of common Bermuda. Two that are in use for this purpose are Ugandagrass and Tifgreen. Several courses in the Phoenix area have successfully used the protective band.

Small isolated plants of Bermuda may be cut out and the spots resodded with good bent sod from your improved bent nursery. Weekly edging seems to be adequate to prevent Bermuda invasion from collars. By any chance could there be bermuda seeds in the topdressing? Prevention is as important as control. Keep the bents vigorous with adequate feeding.

Too Much Penncross Seeding

Q. We finished seeding our new 18-hole course last fall with Penncross after the architect instructed us to sow 22 lbs. on our greens, which averaged 7,000 sq. ft. You mentioned that more