

Good public relation's is good business

By JOHN A. KRAFT, JR.

*The pro must
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community.*

Webster's defines public relations as the art or science of developing reciprocal understanding and goodwill between a person, firm, or institution and the public; also the degree of understanding and goodwill achieved. The interpretations are much abused in many fields, but all golf professionals should be fully conscious of public relations and its proper practice.

The pro who neglects to establish and continually exercise rapport with his members and the community surrounding the club itself is neglecting an important part of his work.

Many professionals haven't had an opportunity to study the public relations (PR) aspect of shop sales. Yet a working knowledge of the manner in which PR

effects the sale of equipment, can increase the volume of business and strengthen a pro's position at the club.

The way to build and maintain sound, profitable contacts with customers should begin with the careful selection of a shop assistant. Since the professional is away from the shop during the hours he gives lessons, conducts tournaments and handles other facets of his job, the man responsible for sales management should be a warm, friendly person who can make members and their families feel welcome. His job is to encourage shop visits and promote the sales of equipment.

The assistant also should understand merchandise, keep your appointments accurately and be able to interest customers in golf supplies and lessons. While a background in the sport is not essential, an interest and understanding of it is necessary to discuss the game intelligently and recommend the proper equipment.

Public relations are most important in your contacts with the club membership. Avoid expressing personal opinions regarding the policy of committees, conduct of players and the behavior of guests unless you are officially required to do so.

When members come to the club professional with opposing views, he can crawl out on a limb by agreeing with one of the parties. But even if he is correct, he takes the chance of offending someone and losing customers. There's a reason. When Jim Kent and Bill Hoyt disagree, it's the divergent views of two laymen. If Al sides with Jim or Henry stumps for Bill, no harm is done. Let the pro express his opinion, and the situation

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changes. It gives the loser an incentive to protest and he isn't likely to miss an opportunity.

Dealing with members calls for a cordial but cautious attitude. It may come as a surprise to learn that Ed Hanson is sweet little Mary Markington's uncle. Don't let it arrive *after* you remark that Ed's a lousy golfer. Sweet little Mary can carry the mail faster than a postman—and will enjoy doing it.

Among the most enthusiastic golfers are the younger members of a club. They are ordinarily 21 to 35 years old and usually unable to purchase equipment as easily as senior members. The pro will get more of their business if he considers this factor and establishes easier credit terms for them. Instead of billing them in full on a thirty-day basis, allow them to extend payments over a two- or three-month period. Since there'll be no carrying charges on the amounts, this is a courtesy that enables them to buy more and better equipment. The pro, of course, profits when this happens. This is best

handled in conversation with the individual involved.

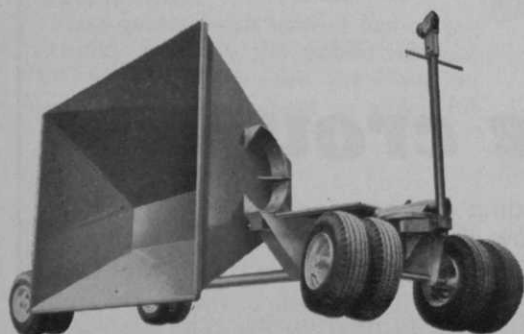
How can you increase shop sales to guests of members? Since the policy of country clubs may differ in this area, it's wise to post signs in your shop that indicate the basis on which supplies are available to guests. The rare guest who wishes to charge items to a member should be alerted to the conditions. Most locker rooms have an information board. Make use of it to spell out the manner shop purchases are available to guests.

Give your shop sales a boost by being one of the first to introduce new items of merchandise. Members are often reluctant to try bright colored jackets and caps. The hesitance is removed in most instances, if the pro takes the lead by wearing them.

Know the club leaders. Sell them on a fresh item and they'll be helpful to you in promoting it.

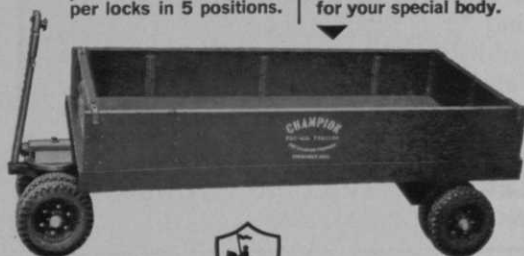
Keep in mind that the goodwill of your customers is a must for every successful professional. Goodwill is something that can't be taken for granted. It

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must be backed up by a genuine interest in the member's progress and enjoyment of golf. It should be evident in the hearty, sincere manner he is welcomed at your shop and on the course.

The "royal and ancient game of golf" as it was known in the days of the Stuarts, has come a long way. Today, the competition in this sport is so intense that the pro must continuously improve his knowledge in order to succeed.

Public Relations, when intelligently applied to golf, will increase the number of lessons a pupil takes, add substantially to shop sales, and improve the pro's position with members of his club.

A PR-minded pro never makes the mistake of criticizing other instructors; he realizes this could have an unfavorable impact on his profession. Take the time to point out some good quality rather than to exploit a weakness.

A regular checkup on shop sales is another goodwill angle. This will make you aware of the equipment that is be-

ing bought, the products that are moving, and prevent you from overbuying slow-moving merchandise. Keep a memo pad in the shop and jot down items your customers ask about. Have them in stock the next time you're queried.

From a PR aspect, the record book is helpful in pinpointing your best customers to show what they selected and enables you to look after his future needs. The members who buy repeatedly from your shop deserve additional consideration for their loyalty. A record book tells you *who* they are and provides guidance on the VIP treatment they merit.

Projecting the most favorable personal image from the club's viewpoint may require the pro to dress conservatively or give him a broad choice of golf attire. If he is associated with a staid organization of older members, rainbow sport patterns in his wardrobe may offend them. On the other hand, a young, progressive membership might look with favor at a colorful type professional. The selection here is a matter of judgment and good taste.

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It's good public relations to mix with the golf crowd. In the clubhouse, dining and locker rooms, join the players and followers of this fine sport. Besides the benefits you'll realize from this association, it provides opportunities to suggest lessons for adults and children.

Keep the conversation on golf. In this profession, questions on slices, approach shots and putting problems are welcome. Useful tips to help their game can cement cordial relations with the members and, incidentally, encourage lessons.

One point to stress with adults is that taking golf lessons adds to the players' enjoyment. For members with children, there should be valid reasons to start the son or daughter at a very young age. Among these, are:

Begin the game with correct hitting habits; learn the right grip, stance and swing; realize increased benefits from practice sessions by showing the child what to work on and how to improve his strokes; develop a deeper interest in the

sport by getting the boy or girl over the starting pains; increase a pupil's confidence—this leads rapidly to improvements; add to the pleasure of golf by establishing early goals of a realistic nature that can be achieved with the instructor's help.

Good public relations is not limited to the pro's club and golf shop. There are many possibilities to gain valuable publicity through the local newspapers, radio and television.

In some towns the newspapers are unable to have reporters available to cover club golf tournaments. This does not mean they aren't interested in publishing the pairings and the match play results. A visit to the sports editor with the offer to phone in news of this nature, serves to increase publicity for club members and establish a close working relationship with the local papers.

Learn the press times for morning and afternoon dailies. It will depend on the number of editions published and the area of circulation. Make a list of these

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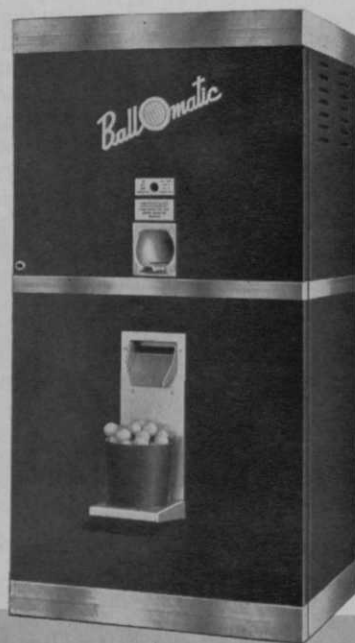
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in order to call in club tournament results on a timely basis.

Similar contacts can be made with radio and television stations. The station manager who wants to interest local listeners and viewers is often pleased to get spot news coverage from the club professional. When you have a tournament planned, let him know as early as possible. Programming time is even more difficult to arrange than newspaper space.

Don't overlook the club newsletter as a source of communication with the membership. Most clubs publish one or more information sheets to indicate calendar events of importance, social or otherwise. The newsletter is usually handled by volunteer members with an assist by the club office staff. The pro can channel information on new golf services, tournament dates, instruction classes, ladies day, etc. He should develop ideas along the lines mentioned and discuss their merit with the newsletter editor.

Volunteer members will welcome the

pro's help and may even reserve a regular section of the publication for his use. With this outlet, a feature on golf technique can pay off on the lesson tee. Using timely titles for these tips such as "Spring Warmup," "Mid-season Checkup," etc., can remind all members—not just beginners—of the benefit they would get from a session or two with the professional.

Other opportunities for good public relations include speaking engagements at banquets and local civic affairs. The professional's appearance at these gatherings offers an opportunity to serve public needs, improve his image at the club and maintain a wholesome relationship with the community. •

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