



Buying for the pro shop

Insurance for successful sales includes careful planning, study and purchasing.

By GEORGE CAPOUN

Professional, Inverness GC, Palatine, Illinois

Like many professionals, my whole concept of buying sportswear and accessories has changed in the last five years. Until 1962, I went along with the tradition of placing 75 per cent of my orders in the fall through salesmen who called on me.

Now, as I look back upon this system, I see that I was doing a lot of *blind buying*. There isn't any doubt that trends and styles for the coming season are well established in the preceding fall because the manufacturers who make sportswear must have from a six to nine month start-up time to be able to produce enough to take care of their next year's market. But, I wasn't ready to buy then. After six or seven months of 12 and 14 hour days in the pro shop, I was weary of sportswear and merchandising. I guess that is why we home pros become "overgolfed." I

hadn't had time to study the records for the season and determine what my members had been buying, and what trends had developed at my own club. I was depending too much on the salesmen who came in to tell me what I should buy. Generally, their suggestions were good but when it came down to specifics, they often were missing the mark.

Then, in 1962, I started the habit of attending the PGA winter merchandising shows regularly. I put off most of my buying for next season until I got down to Florida in January. I was glad that I did! By then, I was able to go to the show with a better idea of what my members wanted because I had time during the preceding November and December to make a thorough analysis of what they had bought during the previous season.

At the merchandising show, I got a much better perspective of the market picture because I was seeing it in its entirety and not from piecemeal reports that I got from visiting salesmen.

Sixty per cent of my sportswear purchases for the season are made at the Palm Beach Gardens show. Thereafter, I fill in with another 25 per cent in mid-May. The balance of my purchases come after Labor Day in anticipation of Christmas business.

It may sound like the Palm Beach Gardens Chamber of Commerce is slipping money to me under the table in strongly advocating attendance at the merchandising show. However, after attending it for six years, I am now convinced that it *makes* money for me. It does away with the blind buying of those former years, since by the time it is held, styles and trends for the new season are firmly established.

Many of the displays at the show open your eyes as to how you can better display your own merchandise. In our business, where, perhaps, displays sell more than the pro and his staff, this is vital. Maybe the best thing about the show is that it re-creates your enthusiasm for the coming season and makes you want to bounce out selling in the spring.

About one out of five or six PGA pros now are attending the show every year. This is perhaps twice as many in 1962. As for the show itself, it has improved immensely over what it was five or six years ago. Another thing that should be remembered is that the pro's expenses to and from Palm Beach Gardens are tax deductible. (This also applies to his wife *if* she works in his shop.)

I am what is regarded as a conservative buyer. I don't buy more than 60 per cent of my needs at the merchandising show because I want to remain liquid enough to be able to take advantage of all cash discounts. There are two other rules from which I rarely deviate: When in doubt, buy white; and don't carry more

than five different brands of shirts, slacks, shorts, sweaters, and jackets.

Approximately 50 per cent of the men's shirts I stock are white. Women's shirts and shells run to 65 per cent. Another thing I do is stock heavily in cotton shirts for both men and women. As for secondary color preferences, I stick to yellow, blue and green, in that order, for men; blue, yellow, pink for women.

I am starting my fourth year at Inverness, and, in that time, I have steadily tried to upgrade the quality (and price) of shirts I sell to male players. I have cut back on \$5 shirts and steadily increased my purchases of those that retail from \$7 to \$9. One sure selling point in doing this is to cite the "compare" test between a \$5 and \$9 shirt "after both have been laundered several times."

My wife, Mary, who is in charge of buying for and selling to women in our shop, doesn't feel that we should try to move too fast with the female members. Her reasoning is that women, while they are quality conscious, still lean toward variety and would rather buy five reasonably good quality shirts for say \$25 than three higher quality ones. In her selling, Mary stresses easy-to-laundry white shirts and shells. They can be worn with practically anything and there are no synthetic colors to run or fade.

Shirts are the backbone of our business. If I have a tendency to overstock any item, it is shirts. I figure you can always get rid of them, yet, I have always tried to avoid overstocking them because I have an aversion to being forced to liquidate merchandise by putting on big sales. Small sales to clean out stock at the end of the season may be all right, but big sales hurt you. Stage only one and your members come to expect them.

Some pros I know order too much stock and, at the end of the season, have to practically give it away to get rid of it. These pros usually are the nice guys — the ones who buy from every salesman who pops in the door just because they

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don't have the heart to say "No." When you patronize everyone you end up with junk merchandise.

When a salesman comes in to show me a shirt line, the merchandise he presents has to pass two tests. It has to be packaged in heavy enough plastic to make the shirt look substantial and it has to bear a price tag. Otherwise, I am not interested because I know my five regular suppliers meet these requirements. Incidentally, I know some pros, who year in and year out end up by giving their stock away at the end of the season, won't attend a PGA merchandise show. They say it costs too much to go to Florida. Yet, these fellows lose more money every year than the tax-deductible trip would cost them by buying blindly and not too wisely.

Sweaters are another item that I think you can get away with overstocking, if you do it within reason. You'll never get hurt by putting in plenty of alpacas and cashmeres because you can always sell them. At Christmastime, for instance. Supplement these stocks with orlon and such in the \$15 range and you will have good balance.

Slacks and shorts are items that I buy with my sales records in mind. Before going to Florida, I make a careful check of what I have sold in these lines the previous season, and, if I go overboard at all, it is within very reasonable limits—say 10 per cent. My members are neither conservative nor flamboyant, and I buy accordingly. Women will predominantly buy the pastels, with navy blue, black and printed shorts getting secondary consideration. Ten to 15 per cent of the shorts they buy are white. My sales breakdown, not just for the last year, but for the last four years, verifies this.

This brings up the question of how far you should go in buying what is predicted as the fad for the coming season. It depends on what kind of a membership you have. Are your members the kind of

people who are always looking to break the clothing barrier? Or do they have a tendency to lag after the fashion? As a rule of thumb for most clubs, I suppose the women want to be there first with the new styles; the men, on the other hand, take a wait-and-see attitude. Last year, the new mulberry and iridescent slacks didn't catch on early in the season at Inverness, but before the season was over, I ordered quite a few pair of them. This year, I am going quite heavy on the new chili or burnt orange shade because I am confident I only have to show it to be able to sell it.

I stick to four or five basic shades in mens' shorts and slacks. Beige and powder blue are reliable in both lines, but from here the preferences kind of thin out. I have always had more demand for deep brown slacks and shorts than I have been able to fill, partly because manufacturers tell me this shade doesn't have universal appeal and they don't risk overstocking it.

Women's business at Inverness is always heavy in the spring, and, if I do any prodding of manufacturers to fill my orders, it is in this area. My wife stages a fashion show every year, and I supplement it with a five-lesson clinic. Around mid-April, or whenever the weather turns reasonably fair, the feminine members of our club start pounding on the doors of the pro shop. I want to have every available piece of stock on hand to accommodate them as I feel a sale lost in the spring may be lost forever.

To give you an idea of how important I think women's spring business is, I have recently finished a room in the basement of my home as a miniature pro shop and I plan to sell out of it if the weather delays the opening of the season. If good weather is slow in making its appearance I also have a net rigged up in the heated garage of my home where I will run my women's clinic, if on somewhat of a restricted basis.

Like most pros I have talked to, the question of how many pairs of shoes to

stock is a problem. I have stocked heavy, and I have stocked light, and always seem to end up with more pairs on my shelves than I care to have. In the last couple years, I have restricted my stock to about three dozen pairs for men and five or six dozen pairs for women, and I have made out reasonably well. There are two things I have become convinced of as far as shoes are concerned: You can tie up more capital than you can afford to invest if you aren't cautious in stocking them; and, 80 per cent of men's shoes have to be ordered compared to about 50 to 60 per cent for women.

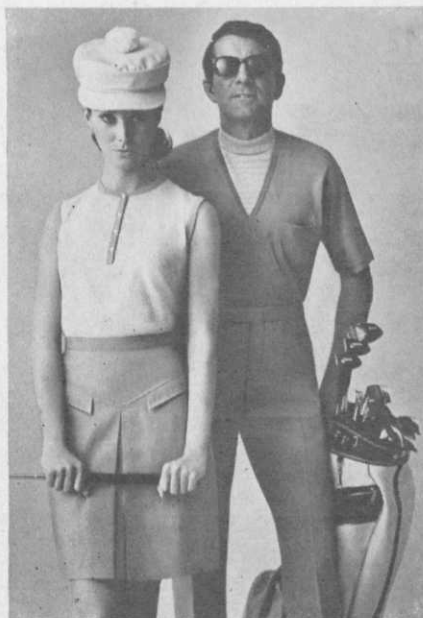
Another item I am quite cautious in ordering is women's hats. I don't know if it is a case of the hairdo not fitting most hats you can stock or the reverse, but I never have been able to solve the riddle of the hats to the satisfaction of my women players. Maybe I should blame this on my wife since she is in charge of the hat department. But, I will give her credit for doing a lot of

opinion sampling among the ladies as to what they want. However, it seems that every woman has a different idea.

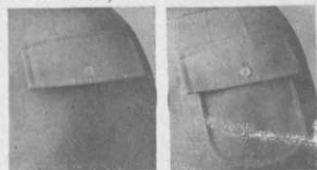
In conclusion, I say that a golf pro should buy defensively, keeping in mind the investment he is putting into every order, and whether he is going to get his money out of it without giving away his merchandise at a sale. He shouldn't spread his stock over too many items, and he should make a special effort to train his staff to sell the merchandise he handles. He should guide his customers to buy what he carries in stock and avoid special ordering as much as possible.

When I place my big order at the PGA merchandising show in January, and the secondary one in May, it is always with the thought: Am I going to be able to get rid of this merchandise by the middle of the summer and have practically bare shelves by July 15 or August 1, at the latest? If not, I am going to have to scramble for another month or two to get my profit out of the operation. •

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