

It's up to you...

Successful buying depends on your own research, planning and keen interest in the job that must be done.

by Harry Obitz and Dick Farley

GOLFDOM Merchandising Consultants

Good buying methods do not change over the years and are in fact basically the same as they were in ancient times when the Romans were the leading merchants of their day. They analyzed the market, chose their items carefully for quality, style, and value and bought according to their individual requirements and means, just as you must do today.

Buying can be as pleasurable and as adventurous as your favorite hobby, or as frustrating and confusing as a college physics exam is to the unprepared freshman. It all depends on you, your research, your planning and your keen interest in the job to be done.

ANALYZE YOUR CLIENTELE

The first step to successful buying is to analyze your clientele. Are you catering to the Cadillac trade or are your customers mostly middle income people? This is a basic decision and will determine which line of merchandise you will choose, and which price ranges you will sell.

We have seen far too many golf professionals with a middle to low income clientele stock \$50 alpaca and cashmere sweaters, \$40 slacks, and \$20 shirts. The result is to tie up thousands of dollars in inventory which might have been used on other, less expensive items that would sell and turn over. And all because they themselves liked to wear these particular sweaters and slacks and shirts. The result invariably is drastic markdowns at the end of the season in the hope of just getting their money back.

Now, we are not advocating that

you shouldn't try to upgrade your clientele, because this is one of the best ways to increase your gross business when you have a limited number of customers. But you must crawl before you walk, walk before you run. It's almost impossible to go from a secondhand Ford to a new Cadillac in one jump.

CHECK YOUR RECORDS

The second step is to check your records to determine what dollar volume you can expect to sell, and how much of this you will sell in which areas, such as equipment, men's wear, ladies' apparel, shoes, gloves, etc.

Setting up your inventory sheets by categories is one of the real keys to buying and can be as detailed as your time will permit. Each general category, men's wear for example, can be further broken down and listed as men's shirts, sweaters, slacks and bermuda shorts, jackets and accessories.

If you plan to spend \$5,000 of your total budget on men's wear, break this amount down into these new groups to determine how much will be spent in each. Once you have settled on the amounts to be spent, you are ready to start buying.

Don't be vulnerable to the "memory test." A very good salesman confided to us once that he was able to increase his company's volume of sales quite substantially by using what he called the "memory test." For the pros that did not take copies of the orders he wrote, or did not make notes of the quantities ordered, he would simply double the orders and leave it up to the memory of that particular pro

to remember in the spring what he had ordered during the past fall. He confessed to us that it would work 99 per cent of the time. *The fellows just didn't remember what they had ordered.*

Too many golf professionals, when buying their merchandise for the shop, fail to program their purchases as they go along. No records are kept of what has been ordered, so that later they are completely confused as to quantities, sizes, colors, delivery dates, etc. The result can be a duplication of items ordered from another source—or you might just plain forget to order some basic items.

We learned this lesson the hard way. When we first started in the business, we paid little attention to the duplicate copies of sales orders we were given by the salesmen when they left. Each time another salesman would come by, he would have a wonderful selection of beautiful merchandise to show us, which seemed better than the last. We would be carried away by the excellent values and superior styling of his line, and without consulting previous commitments to other salesmen, we would buy the things we liked.

All the merchandise that fall seemed to be the best ever offered to us and we bought, and bought and bought.

That winter, we congratulated ourselves on our selections and good taste and looked forward with joy to the spring, when the season would open and the new merchandise would arrive. Oh, how we prided ourselves on our good judgment and astute buying!

When spring finally came, our joy was short-lived, for, when the merchandise arrived which we had ordered the previous fall, we were shocked to find that we had an inventory way out of any sensible proportions. We had spent in total dollars far, far in excess of what our business could possibly do. In short, we had bought too much, and had bought too many of the same items.

The greatest array of retail salesmen in the whole world could not have helped us much. Needless to say, we had a very poor year and resolved then and there to learn all we could about the buying end of the merchandising business.

We soon learned that buying makes the difference between profit and loss, a successful season or a bust.

The importance of keeping records cannot be overstated, and it is one of the real keys to making a profit in your business. You only have so much money to use to stock your shop. The trick is to use it where it will do you the most good, and to provide you with the greatest turnover and profit.

Items which you have bought that occupy shelf space and do not sell are costing you in two ways. First, they tie up the money you spent for them, and second, they keep you from using that money to buy something else that will sell.

A well-known phrase among merchants is "Your first loss is your best loss." If you have bought a dog that won't sell, mark it down and get your money back as quickly as possible. Then, spend that money on something that will move and bring you a profit.

CHOOSING MERCHANDISE

The third step and the most difficult is the actual selection of the merchandise. At this point, individual judgment can be aided tremendously by having in your possession as many facts as possible. You have already analyzed your clientele, and you've determined how much money you could spend and where. Now you must research the market for the items best suited for you.

This can be done in many ways.

By reading fashion magazines and fashion sections in newspapers. Browse through the better stores in your town or the better stores near you to see what they are showing and selling. Ask as many questions as you can—what did they sell best, which colors, and styles? Also many large cities have manufacturers showrooms located there. They would be happy to have you call on them to see their line.

Window shopping in the evening is another great way for someone who is interested in merchandising to spend a few relaxing hours keeping up with the latest fashions. Stores usually display their newest things in the main window. You can learn much about display methods, and window-dressing techniques.

The salesmen who call on you in the fall can be extremely valuable with their knowledge of which items were sold best during the season just past. Look at their new lines and make notes of the items you like.

Today, one of the biggest advantages ever awaits the golf professional buyer who is fortunate enough to be in Florida during the winter and to visit the National

PGA Merchandise Show at Palm Beach Gardens in January.

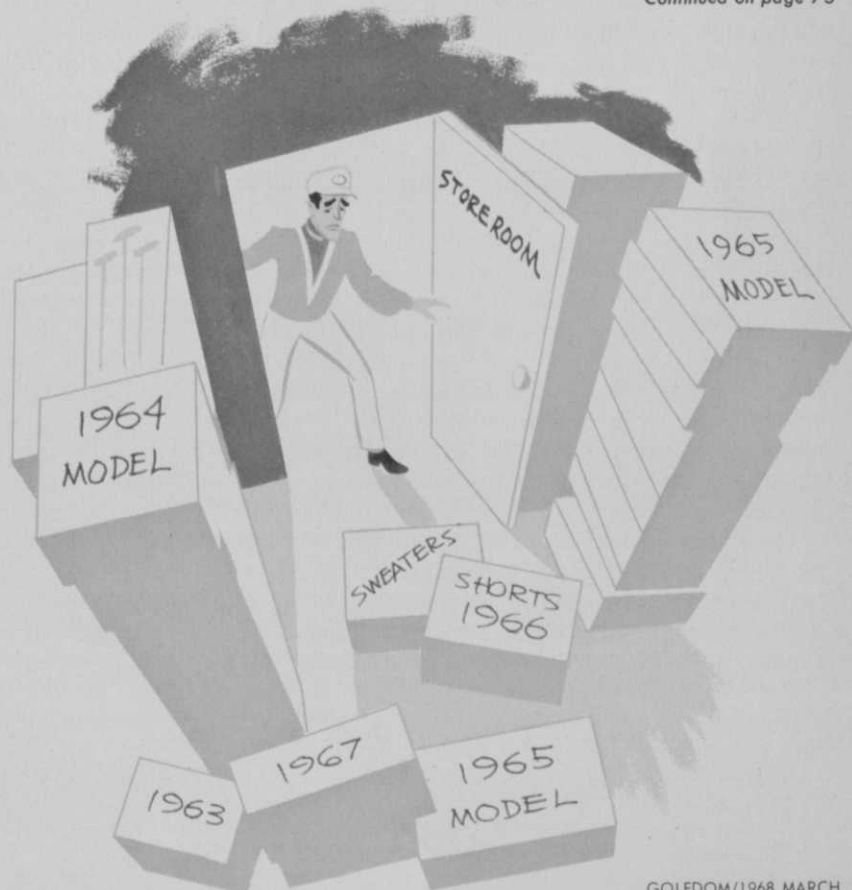
Here he has presented to him, under one roof, displays from hundreds of the leading golf suppliers, with goods from all parts of the world.

In one day, he can shop every line and compare the merchandise, prices and styles, while they are still fresh in his mind. He can see the very latest in new ideas for the golfing industry. The top sales people from each company are there and can explain the various merits and selling points of their product. With your buying records in hand, it is very possible to complete your entire spring purchasing in just one or two days of intensive concentration and work.

You might save a few dollars for later on in the spring, when the salesmen come by, for anything you may have forgotten.

The professional who cannot get to Florida or to the large metropolitan cities, that have showrooms must rely on the salesmen who stop at his club. These men usually call in the fall with the new spring line and again in the spring just as you are opening. They are well

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qualified and experienced.

They carry many items which have proven successful for you in the past, which you can order in the fall. You should do so to be assured of delivery on time. However, if you have any doubt about any item, take down the style numbers, price, etc. and wait until you have seen all the lines.

Many times, you will buy one thing only to see a better value in a similar item from the next salesman.

The fall is also a good time to buy close-out equipment of which the manufacturers are disposing before the new models come out. If close-outs are a part of your merchandising plan, some good values can usually be had.

In this day and age, both men and women are much more style conscious than ever before. It is of utmost importance to have the very latest styles for your particular clientele. It is also a proven fact that customers today are extremely conscious of coordinating colors.

When buying ladies' bermuda shorts you must color coordinate them with the blouses you buy. This thinking can be carried through the entire wardrobe from head to toe.

This is also true of men's fashions. There was a time when men would wear any color trousers with any color shirt or sweater. Not anymore.

You can't operate a business without an inventory, and you can't buy an inventory without money. If you can't afford the inventory you should have, there are several solutions available. You might get extended credit from the manufacturer if you can show him that you are a good businessman and will make good at your club. You could inquire about a loan from your local bank and put the merchandise up as collateral. By showing the advantages to the members of a well stocked golf shop the club might advance the necessary capital.

As we pointed out in the first instance, good buying methods do not change. It still takes planning, research, imagination, hard work and a little luck. □

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