

Need unusual selling ideas? Try these!

Howard Smith gets sales by any means that he can—displaying posters with sale prices upside down, buying stock in quantity to take full markup, moving goods around, etc.

by Don Curlee

The merchandising bug bit professional Howard Smith when he was 14. The memory of selling an \$85 golf bag is still strong, 26 years later. Now the pro at Diamond Bar Golf Course in Diamond Bar, Calif. (near Pomona), he does just what he did that first day—lets his customers look over his merchandise, answers their questions, points out the advantages of his goods and sells at the price he has determined.

Smith has had success with a variety of unusual promotional events. For example, he once chalked over his outside display windows with Bon Ami, leaving only small portholes for passing patrons to view the specials inside. On another occasion he made up special price posters to perk up shoe sales, then displayed the posters prominently—upside down!

When close-out clubs arrive in the early fall, he stacks them in the middle of his shop in their shipping boxes so they can't be overlooked. He keeps men's and ladies' starter sets on hand all the time, and sells them at \$29.95, about \$5 cheaper than the closest discount department store. Because he bought the sets in quantity, in cooperation with another professional, he takes his full markup. The only time the discount store comes close to Smith's price is when it uses the set as loss leader specials.

He moves merchandise around in the shop often, changing displays and emphasizing different types of goods. His furnishings and display fixtures are a credit to his building. He never lets the shop become crowded or junky, and he makes sure that golfers feel comfortable and unhurried while they are inside.

Although Diamond Bar is a public

course, Smith works hard at learning the names of the players. He stocks the inventory they want and he doesn't hesitate to call their attention to it. He also believes in newspaper advertising and he uses it regularly, about one ad per month.

When it comes to explaining the items he sells, Smith may be less

timid than he was as a 14 year old, but he is never pushy.

With clubs, for instance: "We always go to the practice range with a customer who is interested in clubs. If he wants D-4s with stiff shafts and we suspect that D-1s with medium shafts suit him better, we like to go with him to hit a few, even if it's just to tell

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Photo at upper left shows pro Howard Smith in front of men's and women's starter sets which he bought in quantity and was able to sell cheaper than his discount store competitor. Cutaway shoe model, above, helps him explain shoe construction to his customers. In photo at left, assistant Bob Ward uses welding torch to repair golf car. Smith, who owns the cars, keeps them in good shape so that he can get a better resale price.

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him he is right. Often, though, we are right, and when we make suggestions that help him improve and enjoy his game he remembers us a long time."

To help golfers remember where they bought their clubs, Smith tags each club in the sets he sells with a small adhesive tape that has his name and the name and phone number of the golf shop imprinted. The markers leave space for him to write in the customer's name. Any time one of the clubs is found, its owner can be located easily, and if the owner wants to replace one of the set, a call to Smith starts the process. Smith checks the number in a special log of club sales, and knows exactly what is needed.

To a great extent, his displays and explanations de-emphasize price, and that, he finds, is one of the best means of insuring his profit on every item. He posts his prices prominently, particularly on close-outs, and includes them in

the ads he runs in newspapers. But he knows that the prices are the same that other professionals offer on their close-outs. He admits that his customers can get the same merchandise for a similar price, but he counts on his other techniques to win them over.

Another secret in his profit picture is buying at the right price. Often he teams with one or more pros in his area to buy merchandise in quantity, and thereby gets a discount, as he did on the starter sets, purchased in 100 lots.

Smith is an avid wholesale house shopper. He visits the wholesalers in his area often, and again, whenever he can buy in quantity he does so to improve his profit margin. And while he's shopping, he visits his neighboring discount store regularly, "to make sure they don't get ahead of me," he says.

He'll take bargains wherever he can find them, "if I know I can turn it at a profit." When professional Jimmy Thompson sold his inventory from the Rancho Golf

Course in Los Angeles, Smith paid \$500 for a variety of items. He expects to realize four or five times that amount from their resale. "What I don't sell, I'll give to the Salvation Army and take credit for it as a contribution."

Smith's calculating approach extends to other income producers in his operation. He owns his electric cars, 33 of them. "If somebody can make money by leasing cars, I should be able to do it too by owning them."

He purchased used cars from the Pauma Valley Club in San Diego County, a private club, where play is not heavy. He figured the cars were not used excessively. Furthermore, his Diamond Bar course is new and still a bit rough for cars, so he preferred not to invest in new ones. After a year or two, his course will be smoother and the turf thicker and he'll be ready to invest in new cars, and by keeping his original fleet in good repair and giving them a

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good paint job, he should receive a substantial trade-in allowance or price, as used cars.

One reason he must promote his merchandising vigorously is that green fees and starting times are handled in a separate location, adjacent to the pro shop, but not connected by a doorway. Smith and his two assistants, Bob Ward and Don Terneus, spend as much time as possible near the starter's location just getting acquainted with the Diamond Bar golfers. This arrangement means that the golfers don't come into Smith's shop automatically; they must be attracted.

Ample window space to the outside helps, and Smith uses two of these panels to display used clubs. This lets his players know that he can outfit them with clubs in the lower price ranges. "I'd hang clubs from the ceiling," he says, "if I had to." Although Smith prefers an immaculate and well-

arranged shop, he admits that too much neatness can put the damper on sales. He overcomes his own inclination with special displays such as the close-outs stacked in the middle of the shop.

As you can see, that first sale for Smith when he was 14 at the Inglewood California Country Club was no fluke. It was while in high school, that he held that Inglewood job as assistant professional to Earl Martin.

Now 40, he has been chairman of the PGA West Coast business school for three years. He also has twice been named professional of the year by the Southern California PGA section, of which he is president for 1968.

The relationship with Los Angeles County is ideal for a professional with Smith's initiative. Of the 19 courses operated by the county, Diamond Bar is considered to have among the best potential. Consequently, the monthly rental paid by Smith is among the highest of any of the courses in the current setup.

But the potential works to his advantage too. The Diamond Bar course is carved out of a residential and commercial development that is expected to be a community unto itself of about 80,000 to 100,000 residents. Population is only about 20,000 now.

Turning his inventory four times is not unusual and he has turned it as many as seven times in a year, although that was before Diamond Bar. But he is convinced that the profit potential at Diamond Bar is almost unlimited.

The course includes a lighted driving range that hasn't been used at night yet, but is sure to add significantly to traffic and profits.

Smith believes that many professionals are missing a sure bet in not recognizing the profit opportunities in their merchandising activities. But then, not everybody sustains such a lasting reaction when the merchandising bug bites. And unfortunately, as Smith sees it, some never get bitten at all. □

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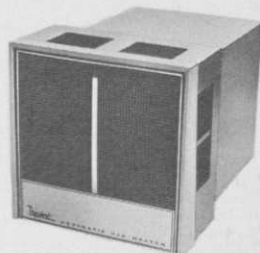
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