

Selling Apparel: One Woman's Approach

BY IRENE KOENNECKER



Today, the well-stocked pro shop should have an extensive women's golf-wear department. Buying and selling to women require special handling, which is best done by another woman, says this highly successful merchandiser



The professional must be flexible when buying pro shop fashions. Golfwear today, like all fashions, changes radically from season to season in style, colors and fabrics. Because of this, the pro shop buyer should be aware of what will be in vogue for the coming season.

When ordering culottes and skirts, there are certain basic buying rules to remember: the buyer must order a variety of lengths because each customer's taste and size vary. He must also know what will sell in his shop, what age bracket his golfers are and how much they are willing to spend. But first the professional must find out what the fashion regulations are at his club and buy accordingly. For example, if the club does not allow mini-length culottes or skirts on the golf course, the pro shouldn't stock any or stock very few if they are allowed in the clubhouse.

When ordering culottes and

The pro shop (opposite) is airy, spacious and inviting to both regulars and browsers. Irene Koennecker (below left) believes that customers should touch items and that attractive displays (below) help to sell the merchandise.

skirts, a pro should know what sizes are appropriate for his members. For example, I not only need sizes six and eight, but larger ones as well. Therefore, I order at least three of each size and style. Another shop may need more eights or more size 16s. Each pro shop will vary in the size range it carries according to the clientele it serves.

Golf shorts, although not as popular as they were some years ago, are still worn in certain areas. Therefore, pro shops should have a few in stock to supply the members' demands. Again, the pro should first find out specifically from the members what they want.

The pro shop should also stock an assortment of tops designed and dyed to coordinate with the skirts, culottes and shorts. Sleeveless and long sleeve shirts should be available in knits, cut and sewn and easy-care polyesters. The location of the club and the climate, generally, will determine the fabrics needed. If your shop, for example, is in mild climate, sportswear of Dacron/wool blends should be stocked heavily. Incidentally, a professional must be knowledgeable about the care of the new man-made fibers being used predominately in golfwear lines.

Sweaters are another very important item to stock in the pro shop. Manufacturers are now dyeing them to match the rest of the outfit to complete the total look. The same colors that are ordered for the sweaters should also be bought for culottes or skirts. Colors can be handsomely mixed as well as matched, but only if the dye lots from the various manufacturers blend. Generally it is wiser when mixing colors to suggest one manufacturer's line to the client.

It is important also to stock some wool sweaters in the shop because they are appropriate après-golf as well. For a well-rounded variety of merchandise, include golf peds and knee socks to mix or match outfits as well as hats in both straw and cloth fabrics. Golf

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gloves are other items that have entered the fashion picture and now come in all the new colors to mix and match with the ready-to-wear.

I have found that in my shop, more and more women are demanding casual sports clothes for après golf and evening wear; therefore, I carry a line of pant suits and skirts that are suitable for afternoon and evening. Again, the pro shop's clientele and location will determine how much après golf-wear should be stocked.

The more resort oriented the area, the larger the amount of formal wear to be bought. As in all types of retail operation, buying for the customer's fashion demands must be the pro shop buyer's primary consideration when ordering merchandise to guarantee high volume sales.

In order to maintain a well-stocked pro shop keep a weekly estimated inventory of the best-selling items. These can then be reordered to sell well before the season is over.

In my shop we do a lot of mailing to the customer who requests more merchandise after she returns home. Since this is an important part of our business, we keep accurate records of all purchases, including the customer's size and the type of styles she favors. Remember that the most important thing a pro shop offers is service. This includes knowing customers by name and remembering their likes. If a special order is taken, make sure to follow through on it.

One of the best assets a pro can have in his shop is a woman who can both buy and sell. Women do not always like to buy from a man because they can't discuss their

Women can talk to other women (above), especially about clothes—a definite advantage, believes Irene. Other tips? Hang golfwear up (below) wherever possible and coordinate it so that customers can see how the various elements look when put together.



needs as freely. A woman employee is more flexible in a new operation of a pro shop than a man. She can take care of the desk and also help the women and men customers.

Finally, but equally important, merchandise should be displayed attractively. A pro cannot sell merchandise unless he creates the desire in the customer to try the outfit on. Customers like to be able to touch the merchandise; the more a pro can hang up the more sales he will have. Anything put away in drawers is lost business. What the customer doesn't see, she doesn't ask for. Displays should be changed often, if the same people are coming through the shop every day. Remember, a professional cannot sell from an empty cart. Keep the shop well-stocked, and sales will follow. □

Mrs. Koennecker began her career in the golf business 20 years ago with her husband, Jack. Nine years ago, she and her husband went to the Canyon CC in Palm Springs, Calif., where Mr. Koennecker is golf director. Their enterprise is now a family affair since their son, Jack Jr., joined his mother in the pro shop to learn the tricks of the pro shop trade.

