

SERVICE: THE POTENT PROFIT TOOL

Preoccupation with price as a competitive force leads many professionals to forget areas in which they can have a distinct advantage over the "downtown" competition. "Service above all" is the motto at Columbine's pro shop, and sales volume proves the wisdom of these words

by JERRY CLAUSSEN

"I don't ever want to put up a sign saying, 'Closed, We Undersold Everybody.'"

Tony Novitsky was smiling, but completely serious about serving the members as professional at Columbine CC, in Littleton, a suburb just outside Denver.

"We are always available for the members' convenience," he continues. "We rely on and expect their support. We want the best for a member. We want him to buy only what fits him and what he can enjoy."

Novitsky is emphatic about dealing with the "problem" of competition from discount stores, closeouts and other "deals" available today to golfers.

"This isn't a new problem. We don't try to compete; we don't intend to try," the section's 1967 Pro of the Year answers. "Low price is always easy to sell. But no one else can compete with us in giving service."

Novitsky also feels this question touches on the long-range future of golf and country club operations.

"A country club is not

so different from any other organization. If members don't support the club, it will be hurt and maybe die," he points out.

A veteran of 14 seasons at Columbine, the astute head professional puts service first in all phases of his pro shop business and personal planning. He works at:

- Keeping a flexible schedule to stay available to give a lesson, play a few holes with members, advise on buying clubs, attend club committee meetings and answer questions from his staff and golfers;

- Buying merchandise only from reliable sources that can guarantee latest styles and in quantities he needs when his members need them;

- Having a Feature of the Week promotion, not one or two major closeouts a year, so that members may save on needed items throughout the season. Example: A lucky size shoe discount. "This says, 'Thank you for your support' all year," says Novitsky;

- Accepting returns of merchandise with no questions asked;

- Meeting often with the club manager and course

superintendent to coordinate activity schedules and solve mutual problems;

- Leading groups of members on annual vacation-tournament junkets to golf retreats in Scotland, Bermuda, Hawaii and Acapulco;

- Keeping a complete file of every purchase by every member, noting all sizes or specifications, on unique record cards he designed;

On the latter, Novitsky is a strong believer in simple, useful records.

"There is no end to forms, but our simple file serves well," he reports. "The size, color and so on of each sale are put on the cash register sales slip, then transferred to the file card. We even mark down slack inseam lengths when a man has a pair altered. As the golf season comes and goes, you would be surprised how some sizes change. We want current records always."

These same cards, plus shipment invoices and memos on trial merchandise, serve as the inventory record.

"We used to keep a perpetual inventory," he



The pro shop is open "from 7 a.m. 'til dark and later."

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keep track of every
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qu. Tasteful stands
or bags, lots of col-
or and lighting, ad-
vertising through the
club's newsletter and sev-
eral direct mailings an-
nually, informal fash-
ion shows for ladies'
luncheons and above all,
sincere personal serv-
ice.

His shop has a new look
for 1973 after some major
redecorating and rear-
rangement last winter.
It was completely re-
modeled three years ago.

"Making changes every
couple years is a
must," says Novitsky.
"In our society people
expect and demand
change. They want a new
look. So every time we
move things around, our
members look at the shop
all over again. They hunt
for things they want and



"Change revives member interest," says Novitsky, above. This interior, right, is remodeled every couple of years and displays and merchandise positions are changed weekly.

find other things they
hadn't noticed before."

Denver had a cold,
snowy winter last Octo-
ber to April. So there was
plenty of time and thought
used to make the change.
The control counter and
cash register were moved
out of a corner of the
long, narrow shop to mid-
way along one wall. Now
there is an excellent view
of all merchandise. The
displays show better and
an improved traffic pat-
tern takes members in or
out each door and past the
counter and displays.

"The comments we've
gotten are fantastic.
Change really does re-
vive members' interest,"
Novitsky reports. "The
best thing we did was open
up floor space by building
overhead bag shelves
across one side and both
ends of the shop. Now we
show more bags and ev-
erything else is more vis-
ible, too."

Complete service in
the Columbine shop
means a balance of in-
ventory and sales. The
shop's gross income di-
vides about 20 per cent
from clubs, 10 per cent
from bags, 10 per cent
from shoes, 20 per cent
men's apparel, 10 per

cent women's apparel
and 30 per cent balls,
gloves and miscellane-
ous items.

Novitsky believes in of-
fering variety and the
newest products to his
members. He tries to
keep at least one set of ev-
ery major or "hot" line of
clubs in stock and offers
depth in three lines. He
carries four brands of
bags, three shoe lines with
one in depth, five lines of
men's shirts (two in depth)
and usually seven ball
brands.

He offers no magic for-
mulas for buying. But he
personally keeps a close
eye on sales trends, won't
buy heavily far in ad-
vance and deals now only
with companies that can
deliver what and when
they promise, or at least
keep him informed about
delays.

"I have stopped buying
big in fall for spring and
spring for fall," Novit-
sky explains. "Too many
changes happen in four to
six months. The 'third sea-
son' manufacturers give
us for spring orders and
June delivery makes it
easier to know what we
want and what we will get.
Of course buying on short
notice is risky if we need

large quantities and the
supplier can't deliver."

Like many profession-
als, Novitsky believes
ladies' apparel is a diffi-
cult business, requiring
close attention.

"We can't buy too heav-
ily or stay with one line
too long because styles
change so fast. There are
too many lines available.
Fitting also is a prob-
lem. And special orders
during season are out of
the question because they
don't get delivered," he
reasons.

He does stock men's
jackets and some special-
ty items popular as gifts:
ladies' jewelry, floor-
length dresses, golf novel-
ties, portable TVs for ex-
ample. He stocks only a
few samples and uses a lo-
cal warehouse to replenish
on short notice.

Merchandising golf
clubs gets Novitsky's high-
est priority for services.

"There is no such thing
as one club being best for
everybody," Novitsky, the
1965 Colorado Section
PGA champion, observes.
"Personal fit is impor-
tant. The customer de-
serves to try two or three
brands he might like."

Novitsky or an assist-
ant takes the member just

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Novitsky says his staff al-
ways has something
worthwhile to contribute.
Salesgirl Bunny Dengler,
above, arranges a long-
dress tree.



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outside the shop door to the practice range to let him hit balls with several clubs. The member decides what brand he likes. But unless the member knows what he needs and wants, the professional chooses the weight, length, shaft and so on.

Columbine CC is a golfers' club, but also a modern suburban family facility. Founded in 1957, it is encircled by a luxurious residential community, Columbine Valley, along the South Platte River. Columbine and Novitsky were hosts to the 1967 PGA Championship won by Don January.

The club currently lists about 425 men golfers and 250 women players and at least 120 active juniors. The narrow bag storage room is packed to the ceiling with 325 bags.

The pro shop is open 7 a.m. until dark or later, six days a week. Novitsky says he personally tries to close up at night when he can "spend 20 to 30 minutes looking around the shop to ask: 'What can we do better?'"

He has a young, talented and conscientious staff. First assistant John Clark, a strong teacher and merchandiser, came to Columbine CC from Minnesota four years ago. Assistant Alan Resinger and salesgirl Bunny Dengler, plus another girl hired for the summer, complete the shop staff. Novitsky oversees a caddie master, starter-ranger and the three boys in club storage.

"We look for something in each assistant beyond the usual," says Novitsky. He cites John's display know-how and Alan's sign-making as helpful extras.

What about the future? Novitsky is optimistic about the country club business.

"Our profession is more challenging and moving ahead in many ways," he replies. "The manufacturers are coming out with better equipment faster than ever. The PGA is doing great things for us with their business schools.

"I just have to keep looking ahead six months to a year or more to find new methods and keep improving our service," says the professional who never forgets that his members come first. □