

**A** special news bulletin? Hardly. The big story at this year's National Golf Course Owners Association meeting in Orlando had to do with getting more people to play golf.

Big sigh. Yeah, it's the same old story, but it still has to be addressed.

If you live and breathe in the golf industry, you should know that your livelihood is not without its problems. You've been told time and again that more courses are being built, but they don't come with more golfers. The result, as put by NGCOA executive director Mike Hughes, is that "competition in the industry is at a level that no one would have ever anticipated."

If you aren't aware of the increased competition, you must be living under a granite tee marker. And judging by the response of several golf courses to a recent NGCOA promotion, there are industry people living under such rocks.

Last fall, NGCOA debuted its City Golf Blitz in three cities. The simple goal of the City Golf Blitz is to attract new golfers. But more importantly, the program's goal is to convince potential new golfers that the game is more hospitable and fun than they think.

Anne Lyndrup, NGCOA's administrative director who helped organize the City Golf Blitz, assumed that course owners in the three cities — Atlanta, Charleston, S.C., and Phoenix — would be champing at the bit to get involved in NGCOA's program upon hearing about it.

"But I was shocked at the lack of response," Lyndrup reveals.

Apparently, many owners don't want to take on new golfers because they don't want to have to attend to their needs, Lyndrup says, noting that some owners don't even see the need to develop new players.

What would happen if New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner announced that he didn't need to develop new players in his organization's farm system because he was content with his present lineup? Georgie and his Pin Strippers would soon be in the basement of the American League.

This is basic stuff, as in marketing 101. If a golf course owner is content with his current amount of business — and he doesn't think he

## Time for Owners to Don Thinking Caps

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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has to gain new players through promotions and customer service — he'll be out of business as fast as a Chinese restaurant that doesn't sell chop suey.

Owners must realize they can't be solely concerned with the now. Yes, they must attend to their current customers' concerns. It's understandable if owners are worried that new golfers, with their slices and unseasonedness, will get in the way of their veteran customers.

But as marketers, they should look at the situation as the ultimate business challenge and devise a plan to attract new golfers without disrupting their regular patrons. It's a matter of putting on your thinking cap, as my fourth-grade teacher often said.

Lyndrup suggests that courses use their down-times to create programs for new golfers. "New players don't want to play 18 holes or even nine holes," she says. "Courses should think about starting three-hole leagues for new players."

Don't laugh. It's a simple and sound idea.

However, there's more to gaining new players than just finding the time for them to play at your courses. A vital component of the City Golf Blitz is the art of dealing with the delicate egos of crummy golfers. If you know a lousy golfer, you know that person is as terrified of the little, white ball as New York was of Godzilla.

In short, you must have the patience of Job and the tenderness of Mother Teresa in dealing with new golfers. But is that so difficult considering what's at stake?

NGCOA is gearing up for its second City Golf Blitz. This time, Lyndrup isn't expecting owners to overwhelm NGCOA with interest.

Maybe the owners will prove her wrong. And maybe they should — for the sake of the game and the industry.

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