

Business Record

Beyond the Green

A New Year's Resolution

— Page 70

Profile

The CMAA's James Singerling —

Page 78

Going to a Logo

Want to make a name for yourself? Stamp it on your club's shirts, caps and everything else inside the golf shop

BY BRUCE ALLAR

The first place to look for ways to improve golf shop sales might be right there on your shoulder. Or on your chest. It's your club's logo, and it has the power to stimulate business — or dampen it.

"I think that's the only edge you have over a discounter," says Joe Rehor, director of golf for the five Bethpage State Park municipal courses on Long Island. He beats the major golf discount chains by offering three different logos on a variety of products — one for the famous Bethpage Black course, one for the 2002 U.S. Open (which it hosted) and a third for the upcoming 2009 Open. "I have nothing in the shop that doesn't have a logo on it, except for shoes," he says.

At the Cardinal Club, a University of Louisville-affiliated private course in Simpsonville, Ky., an insignia highlighted by a red



THE CARDINAL CLUB uses seasonality as a merchandising tactic in its promotions.

cardinal evokes the mascot of the college's sports teams and draws souvenir collectors to the golf shop's merchandise. Head Pro Chris

Hamburger recognizes the value of this logo appeal. "If you have it, it's a wonderful thing," he says, "and we're fortunate here, with being

tied to the university, that we do have that appeal.

"That's your brand. You sell that brand."

Hamburger and John Sobecki, the general manager, have introduced variations on the original logo, which features a large black "C" interlocked with a large red "C" (the school's colors) and the head of a cardinal, with "Cardinal Club" embroidered beneath it. At times they'll order items that feature only the insignia with no underlying words. Other times, they'll have manufacturers move the logo to different spots on the clothing.

"With 400 members, if you look in their closets they've got one of everything," Sobecki says. "You have to try to change it up a little bit. We're actually looking at doing another logo for next spring."

There has also been some discussion of introducing a members-only logo, which guests would not be allowed to purchase. Hamburger previously worked at nearby Valhalla Golf Club, which has hosted two PGA Cham-

Continued on page 72

GOING TO A LOGO

Continued from page 69
pionships and will be the site of the 2008 Ryder Cup, and says the members-only insignia caught on slowly there but eventually became a good seller at that ultra-private Louisville-area course.

The Cardinal Club, which opened in 2001, tracks shop sales by calculating retail revenue per round, a figure that excludes any guest or golf car fees. Hamburger reports a healthy \$10 to \$12 per round in retail sales. It has a loyal customer base: The Cardinal Club hosts home matches for the University of Louisville men's and women's teams and

tapped alumni and school boosters for membership. It also accommodates an estimated 3,000 guest golfers per year, many of them University of Louisville fans, either playing with members or attending events. To sell to this loyal audience, the golf shop was purposely sited just inside the front door to the clubhouse, making it a first stop for most who enter.

Hamburger makes his merchandise visible with a variety of techniques. He and his staff assemble frequent themed displays, picking up on such things as springtime's Kentucky Derby, mid-summer's

Fourth of July or the fall football season. The head pro also rotates apparel on and off discount tables. One table on wheels, offering 20 percent to 40 percent off, is posted just outside of the shop or moved to other high-visibility areas such as the patio between the bar and the putting green.

"There's a secret: If you want to get rid of it and put it on sale, if you physically move it out of the shop, it'll sell better than if it's within the shop," Sobecki says. "Whether it's on a rolling cart with hangers that's outside or on a sales table in the hallway, people's perception

is, 'This must be on sale.' You can put it on a rack in the middle of the shop with a sticker that says 20 percent off and it doesn't get the same kind of response."

Mike Hill, director of golf services at Angels Crossing Golf Club near Kalamazoo, Mich., drives sales by handwriting special tags for a select few items in stock. The director of golf services at this public course personally inscribes, "Thanks for shopping Angels Crossing," and then marks the price way down. Those few bargain items — say a \$40 shirt going for \$12.95 — are

Continued on page 74

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GOING TO A LOGO

Continued from page 72
placed back in the midst of the rest of the non-sale merchandise. "It's there to physically reward someone who's actually going through the merchandise," Hill says. "Now I'm starting to get golfers coming in looking for those items."

Hill doesn't promote these deals, but word is getting around and more customers are digging through shirts, sweaters and other goods to find them. "That's what I want to happen," he says, knowing that the bargain hunters will find other must-have items while they hunt for the price breaks.

Hill brought 25 years of sales and marketing experience outside of the golf industry with him when he signed on with Angels Crossing, which opened in May 2004, and placed an emphasis on service. "We try to greet everyone immediately in the golf shop and get to know as many by name as possible," Hill says. "We offer our assistance but don't badger. There's a fine line between being helpful and being oppressive, and we try not to cross that line."

Every piece of clothing is logoed, with the exception of some rainwear. Balls with the Angels Crossing insignia



THE CARDINAL CLUB tracks shop sales by calculating retail revenue per round minus guest or golf car fees.

are also popular because the course — 18 singular holes on 350 acres — is a destination for many golfers. Despite being constricted by temporary quarters of 1,500 square feet in what will become a clubhouse is constructed, Hill describes his shop business as "just starting to grow." He doesn't analyze sales per round but says 70 percent of revenue is from soft goods and 30 percent from hard goods such as clubs, shoes, balls and bags.

The goal at The Wilds Golf Club in Prior Lake, Minn., is to exceed \$500,000 each year in golf shop retail sales. Shad Gordon, who has been with the top-ranked public course since it opened in 1995, worked his way up from scrubbing golf cars to head pro before becoming general manager two years ago. He says he stopped analyzing sales on a per-round basis and now looks at them month by month. Most slow days are related to holidays and lousy weather, he says. He responds by gearing holiday sales to the likes of Memorial Day, the Fourth of July and Labor Day. As an example, The Wilds discounted anything red, white

or blue by 20 percent to 40 percent during the July 4 holiday.

The weather near Minnesota's Twin Cities can be brutally cold even in spring and fall, so The Wilds introduced a "Play the Temperature" promotion, which Gordon describes as his biggest hit. Golfers are charged the degree-Fahrenheit reading that is registered a half-hour before their tee times. On a 28-degree day, for example, players pay \$28 for greens fees and a car. "When other courses are not doing anything, we're full," Gordon says, noting that many golfers take pride in seeing how low they can go — temperature-wise, that is.

The promotion has worked so well that The Wilds, according to Gordon, has trademarked "Pay the Temperature" and "Play the Temperature" to keep them as signature offers. Another club in the Twin Cities area has countered with "Play the Dew Point."

Golf shop sales increase on those cold days as well, so it's a win-win for the club. Gordon also uses price reductions to jump-start purchases on bad weather days.

Continued on page 76

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GOING TO A LOGO

Continued from page 74

"When it's rainy out, put your raingear on sale," he advises. "You're going to sell more if they need it that same day and if you put a little incentive in there to buy it."

The Wilds shop will occasionally offer packages that bundle a free shirt and hat with greens fees. The clothing items are add-ons to encourage rounds during slow times, like Mother's Day or some other holidays. "Other courses are

discounting (greens fees)," Gordon says. "We want our full amount and then we'll throw in value-added products."

The typical Wilds golf shop staffer (excluding the assistant golf professionals) is promoted from some entry-level jobs. "You need to get people who are knowledgeable but also who are personable," Gordon says. They receive salaries of \$9 to \$10 per hour and share in some of the tips. Currently, there are no commissions for sales, but Gordon is considering that for next year.

The process of developing a logo can be serendipitous. At Angels Crossing, the new course's management team was struggling, even with the help of a marketing agency, to find an appropriate image that wouldn't come off as too religious or too Gothic-influenced. Only after one of the agency's employees nearly rear-ended a Pontiac on the roadways — and noticed how the triangular-shaped outside of the Pontiac logo resembled folded wings behind an upright angel — did a properly graceful logo present itself. The result has been a very popular insignia.

At Bethpage, Rehor and Dick Smith were searching for a logo concept and found it one day while looking out the window of the clubhouse. Smith noticed an image of a "caddie boy" carved into the shutter boards, which had been on the building since it was home to the private Lenox Hills Country Club and, even before that, a private residence.

However you arrive at a logo, there's no denying its importance in driving name recognition and sales.

"Before they make a decision on what they think your quality is, they look at the logo," Sobecki says of prospective members, golfers and retail customers. "It has to be consistent with the level that you're trying to attain." ■

Bruce Allar is a frequent contributor to Golfdom.

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