

It's All About the Value

Golf always seems to be the last industry to know what's going on. Perhaps the sport's conservative nature and its old-school demographics cloud the judgment of C-level types who control so many of our public facilities. Because in these lean times, people want to feel like they got a deal, yet many golf courses are not doing enough to spread the word on specials for fear of harming the brand or undercutting the value of the published green fee.

Today's customers scour Priceline for great prices on hotels and flights. Yet in golf, the industry bickers about the future of online tee-time bookings and sites like GolfNow, which are trying to do for golf what the Pricelines are doing for travel. The sooner golf courses realize value-driven deals will drive buying decisions, the better off existing public facilities will be. Business today is about keeping customers loyal and throwing them a little something, you know, for the effort.

In that spirit, here's how I'd lure golfers to the course. These deals are quietly aimed at showing golfers how some of their obsessions aren't so sacred. And superintendents, this is my warning column to you. Since we know all general managers, directors of golf and other acronymic types read this space religiously, brace yourselves. Here goes:

■ **No Bunker Raking Week, 20 Percent Off Sale!** — We all know golfers have become delirious about the need for

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BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



daily raking, even when the sandy pit was meant to be a hazard. So let's give the crew a one-week break, leave the raking to the golfers and give them a green-fee deal. Me thinks they will take the bargain rate over pristine sand.

■ **Green Aerification Week, Half Off Deal!**

— Many courses already have a wink-and-nod policy regarding special rates or policies during those dead days when sand-filled holes are healing. But why hide from a less-attractive product in the short term when better overall conditions are coming down the road? Embrace your necessary maintenance and throw your customers a bone, assuming the superintendent is OK with a little extra play while greens recover. And speaking of throwing bones . . .

■ **Bring Your Dog Thursdays!** — Yes, you'll need a few internal meetings to discuss poop-scoop policies and waiver-claim language should Benji decide to create a pot bunker within a bunker. But I'm guessing anyone who brings his or her dog to the course will only do so if Ruggles is past the hole-digging, all-balls-are-chew-toys stage. Dog owners who also golf are generally responsible adults and most of them will be walk-

ers. Any lost golf car revenue should be made up by the folks eager to enjoy a privilege the Scots have savored for, oh, 300 years or so.

■ **Forward Tee Day, Pro-rated Green Fees!**

— Charge different fees for different tees, with the best deal given to those playing as far forward as possible and leaving their drivers at home. I'm betting this becomes a popular day, not only because the golfer gets a deal, but he or she also has more fun. Pace of play could be an issue if golfers are waiting too much on short par 4s and 5s, but I doubt many will complain at the lower rate they signed up.

■ **Fast and Firm Week, New Low Prices!**

— Turn off the water, see your energy bill go down and pass the savings on to the golfers. In the meantime, maybe they'll gain a new appreciation for fire conditions and line up to demand it all of the time. OK, maybe that's a fantasy. But I bet they'll like firm and fast a whole lot better than the doubled fees for Super Green and Lush Turf Week.

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