

MARKETING GOLF FACILITIES: THE PGA PROFESSIONAL'S ROLE

A MARKETING PLAN CAN HELP GOLF FACILITIES SURVIVE AND THRIVE THROUGH DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC SHIFTS, AND PGA PROFESSIONALS SHOULD BE HEAVILY INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS

By Don Jozwiak, Senior Editor

AN IRRIGATION SYSTEM. TELEPHONE LINES. GOLF CARS. COMPUTERS. AIR CONDITIONING. Televisions. Riding mowers. Internet access. Inventory systems. Clubfitting carts. These are all things that, at some point over the past century, golf facilities didn't have. Over time, each of these items moved from cutting edge to mainstream. Now it's hard to imagine running a golf facility without them. Here's another one for the list: A marketing plan.

Sure, marketing plans have been around at companies of all types and sizes for decades. But despite the many business best practices that have made their way into the golf business, the vast

majority of golf facilities in the United States still don't have a formal marketing plan.

The good news is that, just like each of the items listed above, a marketing plan can be acquired,





implemented and maintained. Better yet, a good marketing plan can increase the value of each of your existing investments and help your facility increase its bottom line. And best of all, PGA Professionals are uniquely qualified to help drive the success of a golf facility's marketing plan.

"PGA Professionals are the people who are most involved with the customer at any facility: public, private or resort," says Rob Yanovitch, PGA director of golf at Shangri-La Golf Club in Monkey Island, Okla. "We may not be marketing experts, but we bring a lot to the table from the marketing perspective because we direct what the golf experience is, and we hear directly from the people who use the facility – we build the relationships with golfers.

"The PGA Professional is the key to running a golf business, so even if your strength isn't marketing, you still need to be involved in the marketing effort at your facility."

As a second-generation PGA Professional, Yanovitch remembers when golf facilities didn't need to worry about marketing. But demographic and economic shifts have changed the landscape of the game: Public facilities face increased competition from the many daily fee courses built in the 1990s and early 2000s; private clubs are struggling with

younger generations who don't see membership in the same light as Baby Boomers; and resorts find fewer travelers booking pure golf trips in favor of family vacations, while corporate clients have cut back on their once-lucrative travel plans. And all facilities find themselves trying to overcome the perception that golf is a challenging, expensive game that takes too long to play. Facilities are not only competing with other golf facilities, but with all kinds of other entertainment options.

"For a lot of us who grew up in the golf business, we didn't have to fight the battles we do today," says Robbie Wooten, president of Impact Golf Marketing in High Point, N.C. "Nobody needed to market 20 years ago, but everyone's being forced to adapt – and it happened quickly. The business has evolved, just like the role of the PGA Professional has evolved. And marketing is moving up the ladder of necessities for a successful golf business."

Wooten and other experts agree that PGA Professionals don't have to suddenly become marketing specialists. As golf facilities adjust to this new era of competition for golfers' time and money, however, PGA Professionals do need to make sure they play a key role in making sure their facility's marketing plans succeed. That starts with being

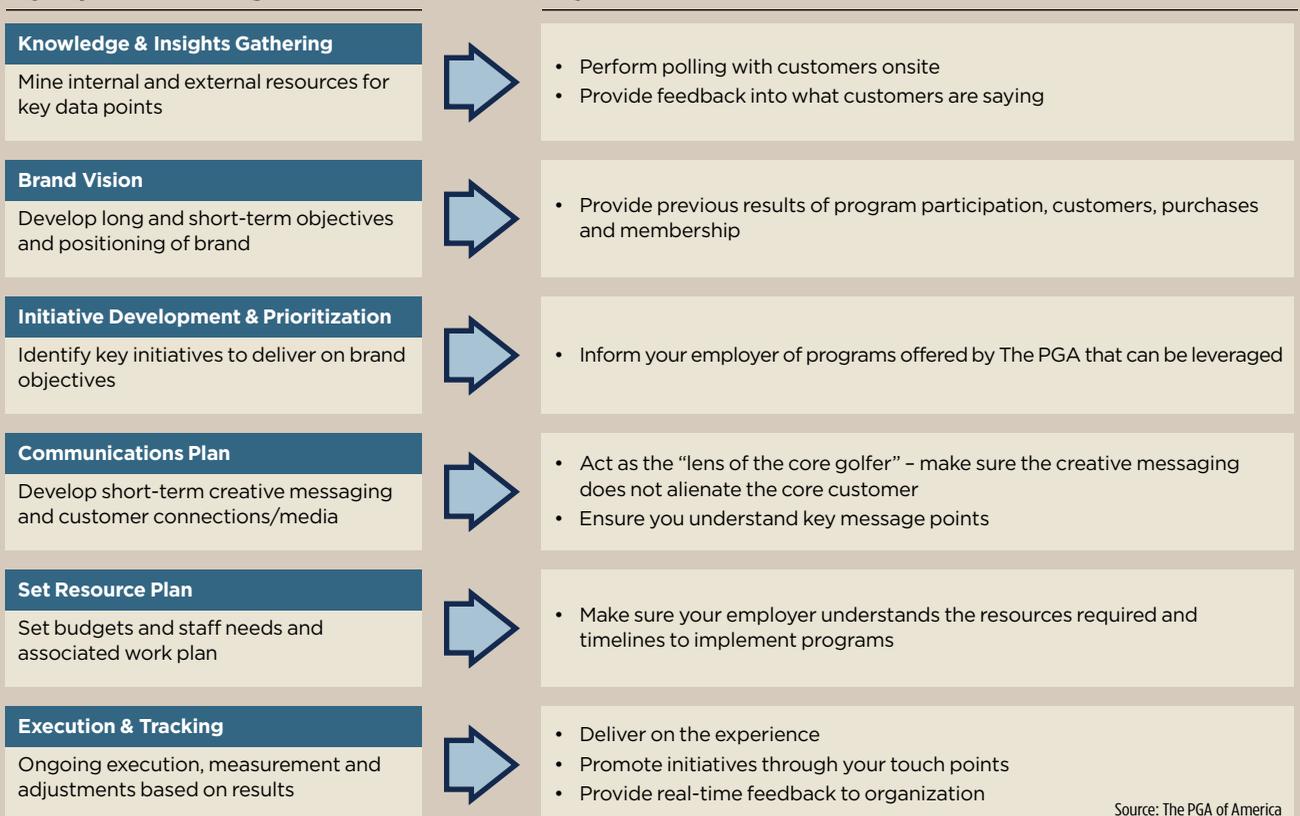
Creating a marketing plan

It's a new world for golf in terms of marketing. As you well know, the days of massive waiting lists at private facilities and new golf courses sprouting up left and right are in the rearview mirror. So in order to succeed in today's business climate, golf facilities have to market!

One of the many ways you are unique as a PGA Professional is that you're the one person at your facility who can actually be considered a component in the marketing model. PGA Professionals are the relationship builders who have day-to-day access to the customer/member. The charts below identify the key roles that PGA Professionals play in marketing their facility.

Key Steps in the Marketing Process

Ways the PGA Professional Can Get Involved



Source: The PGA of America

Seven keys to successful marketing

Smart Advantage CEO Jaynie L. Smith lists the following marketing “musts” that companies across a spectrum of industries, including golf, have to do in order to be successful:



1. Base your plan on unbiased and accurate feedback. Smith says many small businesses, including golf facilities, fall prey to thinking they know their customers better than they do. That includes basing marketing plans on anecdotal feedback from a small group of satisfied customers instead of gathering information from a variety of customers and non-customers.

2. Have everyone on the same page. Relevant marketing depends on internal agreement. It’s difficult to deliver a consistent message or product when

different employees or departments don’t share a common vision. Create a mission statement and marketing plan, so your staff members are all waving the same flag.

3. Have a different plan for potential customers than you do for existing customers. Prospects

make decisions for different reasons than people who are already customers. Market your facility differently to new golfers or potential new members than you do to avid golfers or existing members.

4. Treat different target markets differently. Just as prospects and existing customers need distinct messages, so do different target markets. Your message needs to be different when you’re marketing to a group of working women vs.

a group of retired men, for example.

5. Base investments on what your customer values, not what you value.

Again, this is where research into customer opinion is key. A clubhouse renovation may not be a good investment if what your golfers really want is a pool for family activities.

6. Fill operational gaps. What are you not offering that your customers value? Providing daycare may get more young women on the course, or a short game practice area may bring avid golfers out more often.

7. Think about tomorrow more than you think about today. Much of golf marketing is reactive to a month of bad weather or a short-term downturn in memberships. Having a marketing plan will help you keep sight of long-term goals for the bottom line and the identity of your facility.

mission statement

part of the planning process, then using your expertise as a golf professional – playing, teaching, merchandising, running events – to build the relationships with new and existing golfers that will allow your facility to reach its goals.

What Marketing Really Means

The first step in having a successful marketing strategy at your golf facility is understanding what marketing actually entails. The word “marketing” is often thrown around to mean any number of things, including advertising, discounting, promotional programs and personal selling. These elements can all be part of the puzzle, but marketing is the art and science of getting all the pieces to fit together.

“Creating a basic marketing plan is generally a top-down exercise in figuring out how much you want to invest in the overall plan and how to allocate that money across the various tools you can use in marketing,” says Jim Koppenhaver, founder and president of Pellucid Corp., a company devoted to providing business expertise to golf facilities. “Key things a marketing plan *isn’t* include a series of email templates, or ‘hot deals’ or generic communications.”

Instead, Koppenhaver says marketing is a strategy that defines your identity as a golf facility, involves your entire staff, involves long-term planning and short-term creativity, and can encompass every communication tool from word of mouth to social media.

“Marketing is creating a meaningful dialogue with your customers and the people you want to make your customers,” Koppenhaver says. “Marketing isn’t generic; it can’t be vanilla to all customers all the time. Customization sends a signal to the customer that you’re paying attention and know something about their involvement with your facility.”

Another important thing to know about marketing is that it is data-driven, both in terms of making a plan and in determining how well the plan is working. Before becoming chief marketing officer of Billy Casper Golf, Kyle Ragsdale learned about the

importance of making marketing decisions based on metrics from working in digital media and sports marketing. Now that he’s part of a company that works with more than 140 golf facilities across 28 states, he sees that golf facilities need to follow the same data-centric marketing rules as other businesses.

“You can’t execute what you don’t plan. And if you don’t plan, you’re relying on your gut,” says Ragsdale. “If you don’t know who your markets are and what their behaviors are, how can you really market to them? It starts with basic information and then gets to a more complex understanding of your existing customer, and then goes one level beyond that to your potential customers. Without data, you don’t know what you’re aiming at, or if you’re hitting the target.”

Ragsdale says PGA Professionals are a key part of the information-gathering process, since they have direct communication with golfers on a daily basis. That makes the PGA Professional an important player in the ongoing quest for consumer data.

“From a marketing strategy standpoint, every interaction is a chance to gather data,” he says. “The more we know, the better we can please the golfer. There’s no silver bullet technology out there – it’s hard, it takes strategy, time and money to do it right.”

Why Marketing Matters Now

Daily fee and private golf facilities largely received business for much of the last century. That’s to say golfers sought out golf facilities: Public players decided they wanted to play and asked their friends, or used the *Yellow Pages*, to find a nearby course at the price they wanted to pay. Meanwhile, private clubs could often rely upon a steady stream of potential members seeking to join based on proximity, prestige or other factors that often led to waiting lists and healthy initiation fees.

The first golf facilities to go headlong into marketing were resort facilities, due to the inherently competitive nature of tourism. Golf resorts learned

that the basics of marketing – creating an identity for their destination, finding the target market that would be interested in traveling there, then crafting promotions and programs for those customers – was essential for building steady business, especially when that business was dependent upon rounds of golf joined to hotel nights, spa visits and onsite dining. Some destinations accomplished these goals by hosting tour events; how many golf vacations were planned while watching broadcasts from Pebble Beach, Doral or Harbour Town? Other destinations created marketing consortiums to get the word out about their golf offerings, such as the Myrtle Beach, S.C., area or Alabama’s Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.

PGA Professional Dana Garmany sees marketing as a must for all types of golf facilities – public, private and resort. As chairman and CEO of Troon Golf, Garmany has more than 30 years of experience developing and operating golf facilities. He founded Troon Golf in 1990. “In the mid-’90s, we used to kiddingly say that marketing was putting your feet up on the desk and waiting for the phone to ring,” Garmany says. “It’s a different world today.”

Today, Troon Golf manages the golf experience at more than 80 courses around the U.S. and another

10 in Mexico and the Caribbean, plus many others across Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The company emphasizes data-driven marketing as a way to position facilities to adapt to the generational and economic changes being felt throughout golf.

Garmany agrees with RetailTribe CEO Ian James – who points out that most daily fee and private courses were able to avoid spending time and resources on marketing until recently – that Baby Boomers drove golf’s growth in the mid-1990s. It was tempting to think that Generation X golfers and the younger Gen Y and Millennial groups would pick up where the Boomers left off. Instead, younger generations are proving to be less competitive, more social and more value-oriented than their parents.

And when the Boomers were driving growth, Garmany says the growth was more about spending habits than an actual expansion of the golf market.

“The golf boom of the ’90s wasn’t really about people playing more golf. It was about people spending more on golf,” Garmany says. “They spent more on their vacations, their equipment and their club memberships. Now that demographic, the Boomers, only has 5–10 more years before they’re not golf’s dominant customer. And we know that spending patterns of golfers in their 30s and 40s are not the

PGA Professionals can enhance their job security by marketing themselves

For PGA Professionals, marketing doesn’t end with promoting their facility to potential members and customers. PGA Professionals also should perpetually market themselves and their staffs to employers and facility decision-makers, calling out personal and staff accomplishments to ensure employers understand the vital role PGA Professionals play in day-to-day golf operations.

It’s a matter of job security. “It’s not necessarily a matter of self-promoting, but a matter of ongoing communication between PGA Professional and employer, or those in charge of evaluating the job performance of the PGA Professional,” says PGA Certified Professional Jeff Beaudry, a PGA of America Employment Consultant for the Rocky Mountain region.

No One Likes Surprises

“No one likes surprises on either end of the employment spectrum,” says Beaudry (right). “I feel sorry for golf professionals who do what they believe employers want done, and then one day the employer says, ‘Things aren’t working out and we have to let you go.’ Those situations are usually the result of miscommunication, or holes in the communication process, between employer and golf professional.

Beaudry says PGA Professionals who are constantly communicating with their employer, and keeping that employer apprised of what is going on in golf operations, are less likely to be the subject



of unpleasant employment surprises. Beaudry, along with the other 11 PGA Employment Consultants who serve members throughout the 41 PGA Sections, recommend that PGA Professionals provide a monthly executive summary to their employers. That summary can include financial details, goals and objectives met, as well as business plan checkpoints. But that monthly summary should also include staff accomplishments to show the employer that PGA Professionals and other staffers are proactive in facility, local, regional and national affairs.

“The monthly executive summary is a simple statement of facts that give employers a snapshot of what transpired at the facility,” says Beaudry. “It only needs to be one page, and it’s a great communications vehicle. It’s not like you’re tooting your own horn. It’s a business document, a progress report that shows your employer what you are doing. For example, if Mr. Smith is conducting Get Golf Ready programs and is increasing rounds and revenue at his facility, shouldn’t he make sure his employer is aware that he is doing Get Golf Ready and increasing rounds?”

Beaudry adds that most PGA Professionals are too humble to brag on their accomplishments, but they should still make the effort to keep employers in the loop.

“At most facilities, that employer isn’t at the golf facility every day, so he doesn’t know everything you do. It is your responsibility to provide that information – to market yourself and your staff to your employer, whoever that may be.”

The Wichita Model

At Wichita (Kan.) Country Club, Cary Cozby is the PGA head professional and CEO of the private club. He works in tandem with a general manager and a COO to draft annual budgets and a business plan, and Cozby’s team provides the club membership – who are stockholders – with a comprehensive, 10-to-12 page *Year In Review* annually.

But Cozby (pictured) wants every member at Wichita Country Club to know whenever he or a staff member becomes certified in a specific golf discipline. He wants club members to know when he or another PGA Professional win or finish prominently in a PGA Section event. He wants his members to know how much was raised at a charity tournament it hosted, or why the club is expanding its teaching-hitting bays, or adding a launch monitor to its clubfitting and teaching area on the driving range. He wants the decision-makers at the club to understand that Cozby and his staff are always working on ways to increase revenue and enhance the golf and social experience at the club.

“It’s very important to be out in front and market yourself and your staff to every member at a private club such as ours,” notes Cozby. “When PGA Professionals are promoting and marketing their staff, they are also promoting themselves because our staffs are a reflection of what we do every day. When board members and every member at a private club knows all the little things you are doing to make that club



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—TROON GOLF’S DANA GARMANY, PGA

same – they’re much less willing to spend more for something that’s just a little better.

“If you’ve been ignoring these trends and relying on Boomers, you have a few more years. But golf could have an ugly future if we don’t find a way to get the next generations into the game.”

Beyond finding and facilitating the next genera-

tions of golfers, having a marketing plan simply makes good business sense. According to Impact Golf’s Wooten, having a marketing plan serves as a way for golf facilities to make sure they’re spending an appropriate amount on promotions, sales programs, media buys and other budget line items – and not squandering time, money and other resources.

“You have to spend money to make money, which some people hate to hear, but you really shouldn’t be spending that money in the first place if you don’t have a plan,” Wooten says. “You can’t buy every sales pitch that comes in the door, and you can’t just react to a slow week by throwing money into a strategy that doesn’t fit your facility’s goals. Not having a marketing plan can lead to wasted effort and wasted money.

“Think about it: McDonald’s doesn’t open new doors without a marketing plan. Coca-Cola doesn’t decide what ads to buy on a week-to-week basis. Every business needs a roadmap to follow.”

Creating Your Facility’s Identity

Developing a marketing roadmap can be an involved project, especially for those without a background in the field. Creating a full-blown plan involves in-

better, they develop a real appreciation for the job you and your staff are doing. And it does translate into job security. If everyone sees the many hats you are wearing and all that you do to make the club better, you will always have a job.”

For PGA Professionals who don’t like to toot their own horn, Cozby discovered an ingenious way to market and promote him and his staff at Wichita Country Club. He suggested that the club’s colorful, magazine-style newsletter “ForeCast” carry updates on what’s happening at the club each month. Then a prominent club member had an even better idea. He wrote an article entitled “WCC’s Fab Five” that detailed every major accomplishment for Cozby and PGA Professionals Josh Cook, Brian Ward and Trent Rommann, as well as PGA apprentice Corey Weber. Instead of Cozby singing the praises of his talented staff, the article communicated a shag bag of accomplishments and milestones for the golf staff from a neutral source. Cozby also writes an introductory, overview page in each issue of the ForeCast.

“It is a real high-quality newsletter, and it’s a great way to communicate with everyone at Wichita Country Club,” explains Cozby. “The magazine runs different features on various staff members and programs at the club, so it’s a great way for everyone to stay informed. The article on the ‘Fab Five’ was a tremendous way for our members to learn everything about our golf staff, and it was done in a professional way so that it didn’t look like I was just bragging everybody up. We have received a lot of favorable comments on that.”

Barber is Always Promoting

Jack Barber has had a simple philosophy for his 23-years at Meridian Hills Country Club in Indianapolis, Ind.

“Every day I come to work, I focus on three things,” says Barber (pictured), the 2009 PGA Golf Professional of the Year. “First, I promote myself humbly. I want people to know who Jack Barber is. Everything we do in the golf world is in networking and building relationships. I need people to know who I am because I am the face of Meridian Hills Country Club, and I take great pride in that. No. 2, I always promote my club. In my eyes, Meridian Hills is the finest facility in the country, and I will tell anyone I come in contact with why that is true. Third, I promote the game of golf every day. I promote golf at the club, at the grocery store, at home or on the road. I’m always promoting golf.”

Barber previously worked closely with a nine-member board of directors and the golf chair at Meridian Hills. Now, the club has a general manager to whom Barber answers. But the veteran PGA Professional remains a big believer that PGA Professionals can best promote and market themselves to decision-makers at public, private or resort facilities by simply playing the game with any and all potential decision-makers.

He spends 90 minutes with every new member at Meridian Hills and tries to play at least one round of golf with every member. He uses that on-course time to find out more about his members, but also to communicate. He tells members all about



new programs at Meridian Hills and never fails to mention when a staff member just won a tournament or achieved any type of certification through the PGA or a prominent company education program. He prepares an annual Year in Review for golf operations, and also provides each assistant with an annual evaluation and review.

“I’m one of those guys who likes to keep everyone informed 365 days a year, but we also provide the formal reviews and put it in writing every year,” says Barber. “I don’t feel like I’m tooting my own horn when I promote Jack Barber, because when I promote Jack Barber I’m really promoting and marketing Meridian Hills.”

Barber also advises other PGA Professionals to make use of the best marketing tool they have: Playing golf with their customers.

“In my members’ eyes, I’m like a touring professional and they love to play golf with me. I can use that golf time to discuss everything about the club with them,” Barber says. “I find out what they like and don’t like, and then we can make changes and improve. Playing golf with your members is an important part of staying in touch and a great way to maintain close communication with your members. It also shows your members how much you care about them, and about the facility.”

So next time you’re putting together a marketing plan for your facility, take the advice of Beaudry, Cozby and Barber. Don’t forget to market yourself as a PGA Professional to decision-makers at your facility. It’s a matter of job security – and a matter of good business. —Roger Graves

depth research to discover your target markets, what your current customers like and dislike about your facility, what your competition is offering to your potential customers, and creating a list of concrete objectives that can be acted upon (see page 58 for an example of how to create a marketing plan).

Instead of trying to undertake this process yourself, marketing experts suggest PGA Professionals work with other decision-makers at their facilities – owners, boards, committees – to find someone with marketing experience internally or outside of the facility to lead the process. By initiating the process and remaining involved in it from creation to execution, you’re showing your commitment to the facility and the facility’s future success.

“Don’t feel like you have to take on marketing all by yourself. I suggest going to management and saying, ‘We don’t do this, but can we start? Can we do this ourselves, or can we get some help?’” Wooten explains. “Being proactive speaks volumes to an owner or a board. And people respect someone who says I don’t know everything, but I’m ready to learn.”

PGA Professionals can and should play a key role in answering an important question that guides the entire marketing plan: What is the identity of your facility?

According to Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.-based sales and marketing consultant Jaynie L. Smith, many businesses don’t understand what their customers find most important. As president and CEO of Smart Advantage, Smith has worked with companies as large as Kraft Foods and Blue Cross Blue Shield, as well as small startup entrepreneurs. She says discovering what really brings customers in is a solid – but tricky – first step toward building a marketing strategy.

“We ask every client what defines them, and who are their markets,” Smith says. “What’s the market that you can realistically expand at a decent margin? What’s your image with this target market,

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—FRANK VAIN, PRESIDENT, McMAHON GROUP

and how can we change it – and do you need to reposition or rebrand yourself? Once you know these things, you can really get started.”

Smith points to a quiz she gives new clients. She asks them to list the reasons they believe their customers do business with them. Invariably, research – in Smart Advantage’s case, double-blind “voice of the customer” surveys – shows that the business doesn’t know its best customers nearly as well as it thinks. For example, a golf facility may believe people play its course because it was designed by a well-known architect, based on anecdotal feedback. But research might show that what really brings golfers back to the facility is how well the greens roll or the pace of play.

The PGA Professional can help a marketing expert zero in on a facility’s competitive advantages and disadvantages, and help train the rest of the golf staff to provide consistent communications with customers.

“As we like to say, you don’t know what you don’t know,” Smith says. “But once you do know it, you

Examples of marketing solutions for growing the game

PGA Professionals have a responsibility to grow the bottom line at their respective facilities, but also to grow the game of golf as a whole. The charts below provide a few examples for how PGA members can market the game of golf.

EXAMPLES

Identify Problem or Opportunity	Customer Retention	Raising Revenues Per Golfer	Attracting New Golfers
Analyze Tactical Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build and message database through compelling offers Enhance the on-course experience through TEE IT FORWARD program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at ways to cross-sell or bundle offerings (e.g., rounds + food) Upsell customers through multi-player offers – bring family/friend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote Get Golf Ready through non-golf media Promotions and offers for parents to sign up kids for Youth programs (Sports Academy and Jr. League)
Opportunities for the PGA Professional Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capture names and info of customers Create and educate customers on TEE IT FORWARD option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and educate customers in shop and on course of offers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set-up programs Register programs using ACTIVE.com tool

Source: The PGA of America

need to consistently reinforce the message. Once you find what your competitive advantages are, every customer-facing person in the organization must know them and use them. Instead of saying, 'How'd you play today?' you train your employees to say: 'How were the greens today? You know, we just made a significant investment in new equipment to make sure they're always in great shape.' It doesn't do any good to know this information if you're not shouting it from the rooftop to reinforce that advantage."

A PGA Professional's regular interaction with golfers is especially important for marketing efforts at private clubs, where the best marketing approach to gaining new members is often through existing members. Frank Vain has plenty of experience advising private clubs in 30-plus years of working with hospitality properties and in his current position as president of the McMahon Group, a private club planning and consulting firm based in St. Louis, Mo. Vain says PGA Professionals are ideally suited to play a very important role in marketing efforts.

"The PGA Professionals connect the dots between the membership committee and the members themselves," says Vain, himself a past president at a private golf club. "PGA Professionals are positioned closest to new members, and that's the market that surfaces most of your leads for the next

prospective members."

According to Vain, PGA Professionals can help close the deal with potential new members by playing golf with them, offering a lesson and providing feedback to the membership committee about any concerns a prospective member has. But the most important role he feels PGA Professionals can play in the marketing process at a private club is getting new members acclimated and activated.

"Our research shows that 75–80 percent of new membership referrals come from new members, people who've been with a club less than five years,"

"I THINK ALL PGA PROFESSIONALS SHOULD SEE THAT EVEN IF YOUR STRENGTH ISN'T MARKETING, YOU STILL NEED TO BE INVOLVED."

—ROB YANOVITCH, PGA, SHANGRI-LA GOLF CLUB, MONKEY ISLAND, OKLA.

Eighteen ways PGA Professionals help market their facilities

PGA Professionals often contribute greatly to the marketing efforts at their facilities, and *PGA Magazine* chronicles many of them in the pages of the magazine and in our weekly series of PGA Best Practices emails. Here's a full round of 18 great ideas we've collected from PGA Professionals at a variety of facility types, all of which have had a positive impact in marketing their facilities.

1

Harry Hammond, PGA director of golf, Penn Oaks Golf Club, West Chester, Pa.: Reinvigorated his private facility by shifting the focus to family and junior play, which brought in many new, young members to the club.



2

Brian Crowell, PGA head professional, GlenArbor Golf Club, Bedford Hills, N.Y.: Hosts a weekly radio show called "The Clubhouse" that covers golf in the Metropolitan PGA Section, and draws attention to his home club throughout the listening area.



3

Phil Owenby, PGA general manager, Kinloch Golf Club, Manakin Sabot, Va.: Helped create a world-class practice facility where members can recreate any on-course scenario, giving golfers a chance to get more enjoyment out of the game.



4

Susan Bond, PGA head professional, Weekapaug Golf Club, Westerly, R.I.: Encourages junior girls to invite an older female relative to join them for group instruction, which helps get more juniors and women involved in golf at the club.



5

Kevin McKinley, PGA director of golf, Treetops Resort, Gaylord, Mich.: Offers resort group golf packages with a portion of the proceeds going to the Folds of Honor Foundation, creating goodwill with golfers and military families.



6

Larry Dornisch, PGA head professional, Muirfield Village Golf Club, Dublin, Ohio: Spends less time in his office and more time interacting with golfers, leading to more member retention and valuable leads for potential new members.



7

Jay Overton, PGA director of golf, Corales Golf Club, PUNTACANA Resort and Club, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic: Networks with PGA Professionals to increase awareness of his resort course in key target markets.



8

Lisa Miller, PGA golf operations manager, City of Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Offers a variety of Get Golf Ready programs at her municipal courses, creating an inviting atmosphere for new golfers and increasing lesson revenues by 142 percent in 2012.



9

Steve Cutler, PGA head professional, Wynlakes Golf and Country Club, Montgomery, Ala.: Took a class in Korean culture to make new members and guests from South Korea feel more comfortable and at home while at the club.



Vain says. "After five years, a member is pretty ingrained at a club, and they've usually made friends and developed new relationships. But when someone's new at a club, that's when they're interested at getting their friends to join the same club."

Vain says PGA Professionals can jump-start the process by getting new members immediately involved through orientation sessions, introductory rounds of golf, lessons, arranging games with existing members and encouraging new members to bring their friends to the club as guests.

"The faster you get those new members assimilated into the club system, the better. Then they call their buddies and have them out to the club, and the PGA Professional can identify them as prospects for the membership committee or director to follow up on," Vain says. "New members can have a lot of enthusiasm, and PGA Professionals can do a lot to put them in position to do a lot of the marketing themselves.

"Overall, the PGA Professional is the chief ambassador of the golf facility. They're on the front line, and that's where you find the nuggets of gold."

Marketing Through Player Development

Tron Golf's Garmany says looking for new members and customers is one of two important market-

Download the "Know Your Customer Playbook"

The Golf 2.0 "Know Your Customer Playbook" details five key processes PGA Professionals and golf facilities can use to build relationships and communicate with their customers, including case studies and sample customer surveys for private and public facilities. Essential marketing advice concerning database development and marketing plan execution are also included. The "Know Your Customer Playbook" can be found online at PGALinks.com and Golf20.net.



ing functions that fit well with the expertise of PGA Professionals. The second function is the timely topic of player development. With the industry-wide Golf 2.0 initiative at the forefront of helping golf facilities create new players, bring back lapsed golfers and keep avid players in the game, player development is becoming a larger part of the marketing plan for many facilities.

According to Garmany, PGA Professionals can assist in this effort both by making the game more appealing to new and younger players, and by creat-

email

10

Ken Morton, PGA director of golf, Haggin Oaks Golf Complex, Sacramento, Calif.: Leads a staff that consistently comes up with some of the best promotional events in the game, such as the three-day Haggin Oaks Golf Expo – which combines demo days with food and music.



11

Jane Broderick, PGA director of golf, PGA National Resort & Spa, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.: Introduced TEE IT FORWARD to her 2,000-plus golf members and saw pace of play improve dramatically, while men's association play has nearly doubled.



12

Nick Wolfe, PGA director of golf, Waynesborough Country Club, Paoli, Pa.: Hosts 90-minute orientations for new members and their families to introduce them to the facility and get juniors started in the club's golf program.



13

Karl Bubnitz, PGA director of golf, Grey Oaks Country Club, Naples, Fla.: Identified women as a target market for growth and started a women's demo day that brought in \$25,000.



14

Mark Lammi, PGA vice president of golf operations, Reynolds Plantation, Greensboro, Ga.: Created a travel program for his 3,000-plus members, which has led to more member loyalty, sales activity in the golf shop and increased networking opportunities with travel vendors.



15

Ken Schall, PGA director of golf, Glen Oaks Country Club, West Des Moines, Iowa: Fills Thursday tee times by encouraging members to bring guests to a monthly men's stag tournament, which increases golf shop sales and brings potential new members to the club.



16

Greg Flannagan, PGA head professional, Old Waverly Golf Club, West Point, Miss.: Sends out surveys to members to get feedback on club events, implement new ideas and increase member satisfaction, while solidifying relationships with the club's best customers.



17

Shawn Cox, PGA director of golf, The Grand Del Mar, San Diego, Calif.: Is introducing PGA Junior League Golf to his upscale private club membership to create fun golf opportunities for juniors and get them excited about the game.



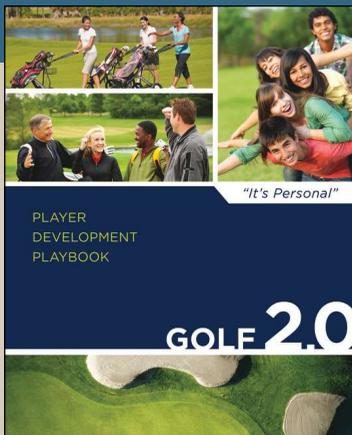
18

Amy Pendergast, PGA head professional, Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, Bandon, Ore.: Educates her staff on proper retailing techniques and product information, which contributes to a consistent message from the resort's staff, and increases customer satisfaction and retail sales.



Download the "Player Development Playbook"

The Golf 2.0 "Player Development Playbook" details six action steps PGA Professionals and golf facilities can take to make the most out of PGA Player Development programs, including real-life examples of innovative ways golf facilities are growing their business through Player Development programming. The publication also details how to make a Player Development Business Plan. The "Player Development Playbook" can be found online at PGALinks.com and Golf20.net.



development

ing new ways for existing golfers to enjoy the game that are fun, less time-intensive, or both.

"As an industry, we're lacking some creativity out there, and PGA Professionals are great at coming up with solutions that keep people involved in the game," says Garmany, whose company employs more than 400 PGA Professionals around the country. "The data is strong that when you lose a player, they don't come back – whether they just didn't enjoy their golf experience, or that they didn't have time to play because they had two kids in soccer. We've got to keep them in the game somehow."

Garmany points to national programs, such as TEE IT FORWARD, and local efforts as paying off. He says Troon Golf's marketing plans encourage PGA Professionals to come up with "one-hour solutions" to golf, including encouraging golf facilities to turn nine holes into all par 3s to allow players to get in a very quick nine holes after work or dinner. He also says PGA Professionals are exceptional at taking the pulse of members or regular customers and making suggestions, such as relaxing dress codes or allowing use of smartphones on the course. One recent initiative: Troon introduced a dramatic new dress code policy at all facilities; a direct result of marketing plans that sought to better under-

stand what younger potential customers were looking for and then finding a way to deliver on it.

"There are still some traditional, conservative clubs and areas. But for most facilities, you can't be stubborn, and you can't afford to say, 'We've always done it this way,'" Garmany says. "Whether it's liberal guest rules at a private club or moving the tees up at a public course, PGA Professionals can make sure golf is fun for golfers. Right now, we simply can't write off any potential customer. You don't want to lose someone forever because they like to wear their hat backward."

RetailTribe's James agrees that new marketing solutions are needed to help golf transition to its next generation of players. He says PGA Professionals can use their skills and passion for the game to keep existing players in the game while lighting a fire under newer players.

"There are a lot of lapsed golfers, a lot of people who tried it and didn't come back," James says. "Those are people who want to play. The PGA Professional can get them into the theater of golf. Remember, they're not buying a membership, or a driver – they're buying hope, they're being aspirational. That's the why. Once you have the why, then you can put together the how and deal with the what. That's marketing."

James gives an example of how PGA Professionals can assist the player development and retention part of marketing by making the game fun. A client of his at a working-class course in the United Kingdom was hit hard by the recession and, despite heavy discounts on green fees, was thinking about letting its golf professional go in the face of a decline in rounds played. James convinced the course to free the professional from some of his office duties, and the professional used the time to interact with customers – and created a fun program that increased return business. The professional called it his 10/10/10 Challenge, during which he would have golfers attempt 10 10-foot putts, then give them a 10-minute putting lesson with the guaran-

Using your tools to bolster your marketing message

Once a facility has a mission statement and marketing plan in place, PGA Professionals can use their many skills to amplify the marketing message throughout the property:

■ **Golf activities** – From giving lessons or walking the range to playing rounds or performing clubfittings, PGA Professionals have the chance to interact directly with their customers while showing their golf expertise. Simply spending time with golfers creates a positive experience, and that can be even more beneficial if you use these interactions to build relationships and reinforce the marketing message of the facility.

■ **Visual merchandising** – What you carry in the golf shop and how you display it can be a powerful way to convey the identity of your golf facility. For example, a

family-oriented facility can carry and display junior golf clubs and apparel alongside adult merchandise. Or if you're trying to promote golf as a game of fitness, a display of push/pull carts and athletic golf apparel strengthens the message.

■ **Building a database** – Look for software tools that let you keep track of golfer behavior and preferences. This can help you provide more personalized customer service, which helps retain members and customers.

■ **Reach out to local media** – Build relationships with local newspapers, TV/radio stations and other media outlets. Invite them to use your facility as the backdrop for stories, or provide them with story ideas of your own that reinforce your facility's marketing message and that will appeal to your target markets. For

example, invite a media member to your course to experience TEE IT FORWARD if you're trying to attract older players, or promote a faster, more fun way for younger players to play the game.

■ **Use social media** – From Facebook and Twitter to personal blogs and YouTube videos, you can use these low-cost methods to seek out your target markets. A good tip for reaching older, more affluent golfers online: Use LinkedIn to connect with them. (See related story on page 110.)

■ **Get involved in the community** – Joining local organizations, such as the chamber of commerce or Optimist Club, will help you network with other business leaders. And supporting local charities helps show your facility as more than "just a golf course."

“FOCUSING ON MARKETING AND HAVING A PLAN HAS HAD A REAL IMPACT ON OUR MEMBERSHIP AND OUR BUSINESS. THIS JANUARY WAS OUR FIRST MONTH IN 13 MONTHS THAT OUR ROUNDS AND LINE ITEMS HAVE BEEN UP OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR. IT’S NICE TO SEE THE WORK WE’VE DONE PAY OFF.”

—KARL BUBLITZ, PGA,
GREY OAKS COUNTRY CLUB,
NAPLES, FLA.

organization

tee that they’d make more 10-foot putts at the end of the lesson than they did at the outset.

When word got out about the 10/10/10 Challenge, the course was swamped with golfers – and the professional booked two solid days of putting lessons. Better yet, the course was busy with golfers who hadn’t been there for months or years, and the course saw an immediate uptick in rounds played. The professional soon had a new contract and job security.

“What managers in the golf business sometimes forget is that people want to be engaged by the experts,” James says. “That professional got out from behind the counter, got people excited about the game and turned them into fans of that course, without discounting the golf. Coupons might work for a while, but you can do a lot more by tapping into golfers’ aspiration.

“There are so many ways a PGA Professional can get somebody excited about golf without needing to take five hours or 18 holes. When a golf club sees a PGA Professional doing things for golfers that golfers value, it’s a virtuous circle.”

Marketing Success Stories

Over the last few years at Grey Oaks Country Club in Naples, Fla., PGA Director of Golf Karl Bublitz has had to find new ways to get his members excited about golf. Like many clubs, Grey Oaks’ membership numbers started moving in the wrong direction, leading the 54-hole club to craft its first marketing plan two seasons ago. This season, Grey Oaks is net positive in membership for the first time in four years with a focus on service.

“All our departments have input into the marketing plan, and our general manager, Jim Butler, is the driver of the process,” says Bublitz, the 2012 South Florida PGA Golf Professional of the Year. “We work on it during the summer so it is fully developed before our season starts in the fall. We do still have to make some game-time decisions here and there, but now we have a good idea what we’re going to do to market the club to new members and to retain the members we have.”

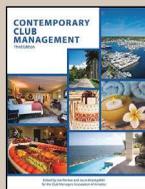
According to Bublitz, the biggest change was running a TV commercial locally to increase recognition of Grey Oaks – and let prospective members know that new membership plans were available. The commercial was cost-effective, and successfully generated new members.

Meanwhile, Bublitz worked with his staff of 23 PGA Professionals to get a feel for which Grey Oaks members have friends in other areas of the country who might be interested in spending their winters at the club. During the summer, Bublitz hits the road to play golf with his members at their summer residences, making sure to invite potential new members along for the round and a subtle sales pitch.

“We have a very experienced staff, and they’re able to talk to our members and make them into recruiters for us,” Bublitz says. “When I travel to play with our members out of season, we have potential prospects lined up and we can start to create relationships before they move south. Once we create that relationship, we have a great chance of creating a new member.”

“Contemporary Club Management” has insight into marketing plans

The Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) has published the third edition of its hardcover reference book, “Contemporary Club Management.” Among the book’s 17 chapters is an in-depth chapter on membership marketing that includes information on how clubs can create a marketing plan. There is also a sample marketing strategy that shows how a club might structure a plan for pursuing a specific goal – such as increasing the number of members at the club.



Some of the highlights of the chapter on membership marketing include:

- **The Four P’s of Marketing:** These are listed as Product, Price, Place and

Promotion. These are the elements that will guide the process of creating a marketing strategy.

- **Steps in Developing a Membership Marketing Plan:** These include conducting an internal analysis, conducting an external analysis, positioning the club, developing an action plan and evaluating a plan.
- **Steps for Attracting New Club Members:** From creating new membership products and marketing materials to encouraging referrals or relaxing membership requirements, several strategies are described in detail.
- **Using Technology for Membership Marketing:** How the Internet and databases can be used to do a better job of marketing for new members.

“Because actively pursuing candidates for membership in private clubs is relatively new, clubs need to use new strategies,” the chapter concludes. “By understanding the concepts of supply and demand and recognizing that much of a club’s market is determined by demographics of the population surrounding its location, a club can set realistic goals for its membership size and develop the best membership marketing plan possible.”

To purchase the third edition of “Contemporary Club Management,” log on to cmaa.org/marketplace and look under the Marketing and Membership section of the Bookmart Offerings area. Or you can enter this link in your web browser: <https://www.cmaa.org/marketplace/p/148/contemporaryclubmanagement>

Grey Oaks has also used its newfound marketing prowess to go after a new target market: Women. Bublitz analyzed the club's tee sheets and saw that 48 percent of Grey Oaks' play from January to April is women. The club increased its ladies' instruction offerings, group golf opportunities and even held women-only demo days. The result was a solid uptick in golf shop spending and ancillary spending throughout the club, while the club's first women-only demo day did \$25,000 in sales.

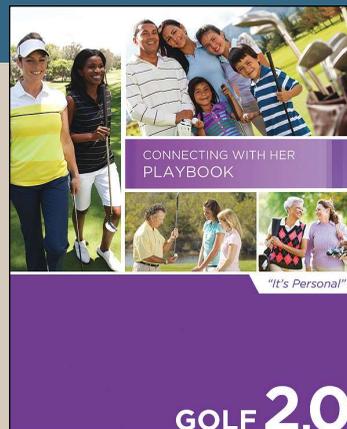
"Focusing on marketing and having a plan has had a real impact on our membership and our business," Bublitz says. "This January was our first month in 13 months that our rounds and line items have been up over the previous year. It's nice to see the work we've done pay off."

At Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio, PGA Professional Larry Dornisch focuses on the current membership as a key part of the facility's marketing strategy. Dornisch has been at the renowned club for 17 years, but over the past two seasons the head professional's job description looks like it's been rewritten by a marketing guru.

After years of spending most of his day in his office, Dornisch found his daily routine turned inside-out when Nicholas LaRocca was promoted to general manager in 2011. LaRocca and club management decided that Dornisch could have more impact on member retention – Muirfield Village's highest marketing priority – by getting out of the office to spend more time with golfers. The result

Download the "Connecting With Her Playbook"

The Golf 2.0 "Connecting With Her Playbook" explains the influence women have in the game of golf, and important information about understanding a woman's perspective on the sport. To help tap into the women's market, the publication includes several action items for golf facilities, including goal-setting, changing attitudes and culture, communication, performing a facility audit, and planning programming and experiences. The "Connecting With Her Playbook" can be found online at PGALinks.com and Golf20.net.



GOLF 2.0

has been strong retention of existing members and an influx of new, younger members.

"Nicholas says the last place he should look for the golf staff is in our offices; he wants us out teaching, playing, walking the range, in the golf shop or in the grille room talking to members and guests," says Dornisch, a two-time PGA Merchandiser of the Year in the Southern Ohio PGA Section. "It seems we used to spend a lot of time doing the work of the job instead of the important part of the job, which is taking care of members and making sure they have that 'Wow!' experience every time they're out to the club."

Dornisch says a more managerial role probably suited him and Muirfield Village in a previous era

goals

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What goes into creating a marketing plan for golf facilities

As founder and president of Pellucid Corp, Jim Koppenhaver has helped numerous golf facilities create marketing plans. *PGA Magazine* asked him to outline the broad strokes of what goes into creating a golf facility-specific marketing plan.



"The easiest way to think about marketing is that it's a sequence of events that the golf facility is trying to influence in order to make consumers choose their facility over any other competitor more often," says Koppenhaver (*pictured*). That sequence includes the following elements: Awareness, trial, repeat, loyalty, value maximization, advocacy and retention.

Those seven components of marketing enable golf facilities to reach out to customers in different ways and for different reasons:

- **Awareness** is using general media – TV, radio, print, a newsletter or website – to let people know about your facility and what it offers.
- **Trial** refers to programs that are geared to drive people to the facility, such as player development, instruction clinics, promotions or coupons.
- **Loyalty** programs include initiatives such as preferred pricing or other perks for frequent customers.
- **Value maximization** is geared toward increasing the spending of each guest to the golf facility, such as bundling food or range balls with green fees, offering replay programs or offering a discount in the golf shop for members.
- **Advocacy** is getting your customers to become ambassadors of your facility and creating positive buzz around it.
- **Retention** is identifying the customers whose frequency or spending are declining, then attempting to rekindle their enthusiasm in your facility. According to Koppenhaver, deciding how to allocate resources and funding across these core marketing areas requires data, planning, discipline and follow-up. "You have to start with some basic information and understanding of who your customer base is, where you're strong and where you're weak in your local marketplace," Koppenhaver says. "That requires either talking to a lot of customers and local golfers, or using tools and technology to get that understanding. It's there, but it's not the most readily accessible information via the current technology most golf facilities possess." For more on Koppenhaver's marketing philosophies, go to PGAmagazine.com.

resources

when there was a perennial waiting list to join the prestigious club, known as Jack Nicklaus' home course and the host of the annual Memorial Tournament and this year's Presidents Cup. Overseeing a staff of three assistants, up to six Professional Golf Management University Program interns and up to 30 outside service staffers was a full-time job in itself.

As noted, that job has since been refocused on member retention, and Dornisch now looks at his day in three phases. In the morning, he checks in on overnight guests, touches base with staff in the golf car barn and caddie shack, then he visits with members and guests on the practice range – filling out a foursome or arranging a game with new members when the opportunity arises. He'll make a second loop of the same areas in the early afternoon, starting in the grille to talk with groups that are headed out to play after lunch. And he'll touch all the bases one more time in the late afternoon, what he calls the "third shift," when local members come out to play and have dinner with their families after work.

Even if it's only two minutes with the caddies or a quick swing tip or story with a guest on the range, Dornisch is able to pass news along to his staff, get feedback from staffers and members, and spend quality time with nearly every golfer who passes through the gate at Muirfield Village.

"I tell every one of our staff members that every day is Sunday when our members and their guests are on the property," Dornisch says. "The national member who plays at 8 a.m. and the local member who plays at 8 p.m. both deserve the same experience."

Dornisch may not be in his office much anymore, but when he is there's an open-door policy for any staff member to share feedback and constructive criticism from golfers and their guests.

"Our caddies will alert us to problems, and in the same way our valet driver who takes people to the airport is one of our most important people for

feedback – members will tell them things the rest of us might not hear: the steak was tough last night, a couple of the caddies were on their cellphones in the middle of the round, play was slow on the back nine," Dornisch says. "I always tell them that I enjoy hearing the good, but I really need to hear the bad. We can always fix things, and make sure that a member who's not happy knows that we're making sure it won't happen again."

Making a Statement

And that brings us back to Yanovitch, the PGA director of golf at Oklahoma's Shangri-La Golf Club. Shangri-La is a unique facility – a lakeside club with a marina that has a membership, daily fee play and resort guests – with a unique story.

Most of Shangri-La's members also belong to clubs in Tulsa, utilizing the marina at Shangri-La during the hot summer months. When the boats come out of the water, play drops to 20 percent of summer levels. Over the years, membership had

"DON'T FEEL LIKE YOU HAVE TO TAKE ON MARKETING ALL BY YOURSELF. I SUGGEST GOING TO MANAGEMENT AND SAYING, 'WE DON'T DO THIS, BUT CAN WE START? CAN WE DO THIS OURSELVES, OR CAN WE GET SOME HELP?'"

—ROBBIE WOOTEN, PRESIDENT, IMPACT GOLF MARKETING

started to dwindle from above 600 to a low point of 82, and many assumed the club would close or be sold.

In a stroke of good fortune, a wealthy member invested in the club, allowing for a renovation of the clubhouse and the club's 27 holes of golf. But for Yanovitch, who had just joined the staff, the challenge was just beginning. Because of the club's steady decline, many people assumed it was already closed.

Yanovitch and Shangri-La's general manager, Jason Sheffield, worked together to create a marketing plan that would spread the word about the club's revival while plotting a long-term course. Both men have marketing experience from working outside of golf, and they knew what to do.

"We started with a mission statement that was and is our guiding principle, and we use that to make sure all our efforts go into meeting the needs of our customers and what we want the club to become," Yanovitch says. "Our model is eventually to be like Firestone Country Club (in Akron, Ohio), and that's a goal that has to be accomplished over years, not by making decisions a week or a month at a time."

Having a mission statement helps Yanovitch make short-term decisions in the view of the long term. If he's tempted to crowd the tee sheet on a busy weekend, for example, he knows he could jeopardize the condition of the course and the no-pressure vibe the club cultivates on the first tee.

"Regardless of what type of facility you're at, you

need to find out who you are and represent yourself as such," Yanovitch says. "Are you the best value, or the best conditions, or the best family club? Whatever it is, stand by it and promote it."

After establishing a mission statement, Yanovitch and Sheffield asked the rest of the management team to come up with 10 items that distinguish Shangri-La from other facilities. They settled on the areas they wanted to emphasize in the club's marketing – having a marina, outstanding greens and a complete renovation – and promoted those features to potential members.

Two years later, Shangri-La's turnaround is stunning. The new clubhouse is open, as are the 27 holes of golf. And the membership roll that was down to 82? It now stands at 650 and counting.

"It's quite a revival, and a lot of it is that there were former members who wanted us to succeed and wanted to come back when they saw what was happening," Yanovitch says. "But having a marketing plan was a big part of it. We know who we are, and we plan for what we have. Shangri-La means public play on Monday and Tuesday afternoons, and a place for members and guests the rest of the week, and we promote the property as such.

"I think all PGA Professionals should see that even if your strength isn't marketing, you still need to be involved. You're the one who's going to market golf to your customer, and you need to be a strong leader. Being involved with marketing makes us well-rounded, and that's how we maintain our value as PGA Professionals." ■

Marketing resources from The PGA of America

The PGA of America makes many different resources available to PGA members who are active in the marketing of their facilities. According to Arjun Chowdri, Director of Marketing for The PGA, this is a key priority for the Association.

"At the national level one of our key marketing goals is to provide members with the tools to market themselves and their own facilities," Chowdri says. "We have already made considerable strides in this area with tools such as the ACTIVE.com registration tool and the new creative resources section on Golf20.net. We encourage PGA Professionals to take advantage of these tools through PGALinks.com and be sure to look out for more of these types of tools to come online in the near future."

Here are some of the marketing tools that can be accessed by PGA Professionals through PGALinks.com and Golf20.net:

ACTIVE.com Registration Tool: The PGA of America has teamed up with ACTIVE Network to provide PGA Professionals with an easy-to-use online registration system for golf-related events. Using ACTIVE.com to attract and register golfers for events can create a new stream of potential customers. By registering your upcoming events with

ACTIVE.com, golfers can use the website to quickly and easily register from a computer, smartphone or tablet device. Even better, the online registration tool includes a credit card payment option.

Golf 2.0 Playbooks: There are three Golf 2.0 Playbooks that have been developed with input from experts throughout the golf industry to help PGA Professionals attract new golfers, maintain avid golfers and bring lapsed golfers back into the game using strategies from the industry-wide Golf 2.0



PGA

initiative. The "Player Development," "Know Your Customer" and "Connecting With Her" Playbooks all have a wealth of ideas for all facility types.

PGA PerformanceTrak: PGA PerformanceTrak in Cooperation with NCGOA is the largest single source of rounds played data in the industry. In addition to rounds played monthly data, PGA Professionals, employers and other registered users of PerformanceTrak also provide revenue data for four key performance indicators (KPIs). These

include golf fee revenue, merchandising revenue, food and beverage revenue and total revenue. Comparative reports are generated for revenue per round with drill-down segmentation by facility size and by state, local markets and for The PGA of America, by PGA Section. This is valuable data for creating and maintaining a marketing plan at your facility.

Golf 2.0 Creative Tool Kit: Available on Golf20.net, the Golf 2.0 Creative Tool Kit is a great destination for marketing collateral on programs such as Get Golf Ready. Some of the materials even allow for local customization by facility.

Education Seminars: The PGA of America and its 41 Sections all host education seminars on a variety of topics, including golf business and marketing. Many of these seminars are held in conjunction with the PGA Merchandise Show and PGA Expo.

PGA Magazine: In print and online, *PGA Magazine* shares numerous best practices and success stories for golf facilities throughout the year. Many of these best practices are about the various elements of marketing. *PGA Magazine* also has timely information on PGA PerformanceTrak numbers and other industry trends that can help shape ongoing marketing plans.