



# GRAA

Welcome to the April issue of digital *Golf Range Magazine*!

Inside the April issue, you will find the following features:

- **Business of Teaching: Marketing to the Serious Golfer** – The high-income, high-frequency golfer who says that score is important to enjoyment of the game is—or could be—a cornerstone of your instruction program.
- **Clubfitting: Making Demo Day More about the Pro** – Major golf gear brands deliver excitement during Demo Day events, but increasingly they're turning the spotlight back onto on-site professionals.
- **Resort Range Profile: Four Seasons Dallas** – The glory days of corporate golf schools ended abruptly several years ago—except at Four Seasons in Dallas. In case you forgot the formula, here's how they spell success.
- **Range Marketing: Catching Golfers in Your Website** – Ranges like Man O'War Golf Learning Center take a workhorse approach to their websites—making sure that customer data, engagement and revenue are top priorities.

Keep it fun and thanks for supporting the GRAA.

Best Regards,

Rick Summers, CEO  
GRAA

[rsummers@golfrange.org](mailto:rsummers@golfrange.org)

# Golf Range



M A G A Z I N E

Volume 20, No. 4  
April 2012

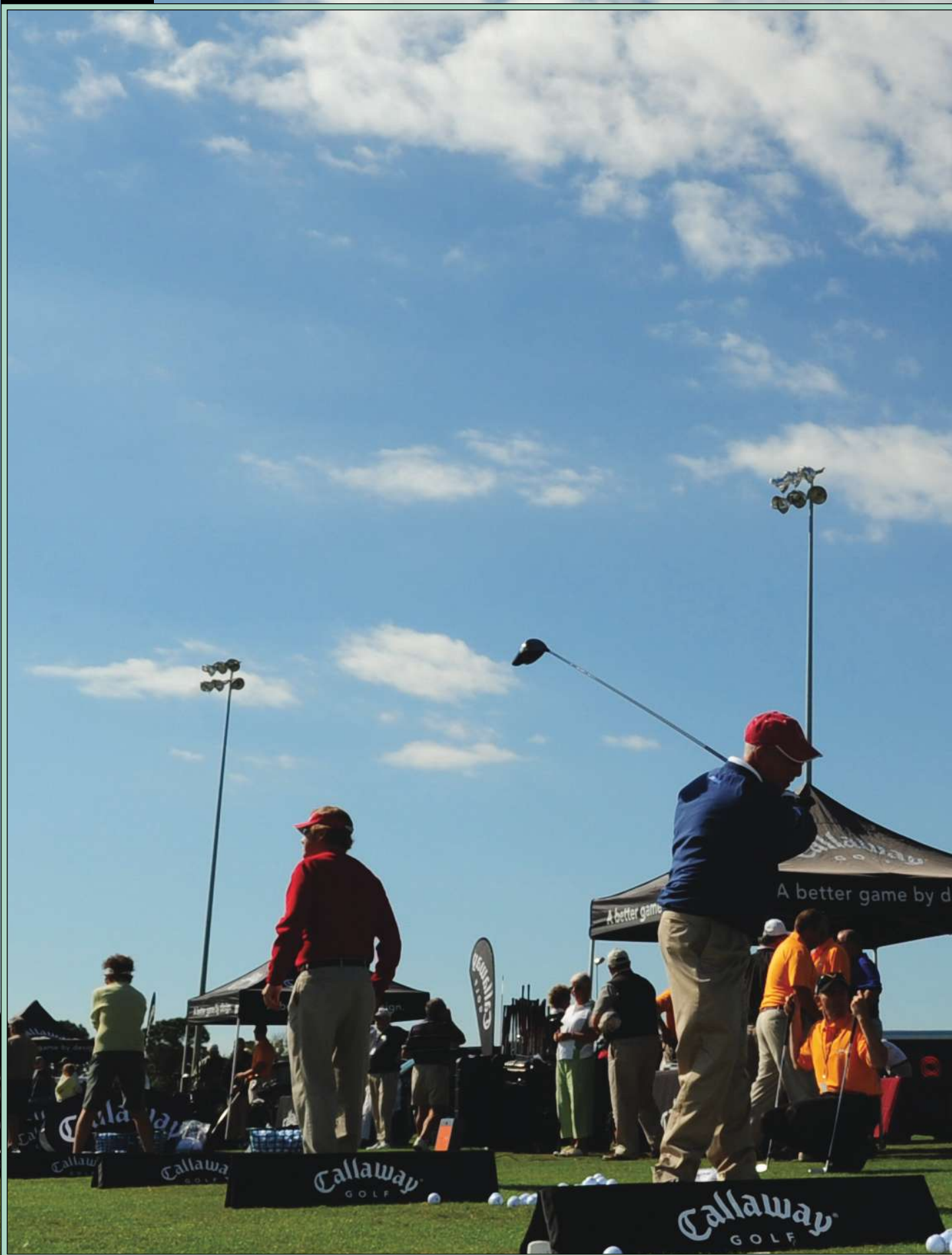
## Teaching the Serious Player

**Stats Reveal What  
That Golfer Wants Now**

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- Websites That Work
- Get More out of Demo Day
- GRAA Awards: How to Enter
- Corporate Golf Hideaway







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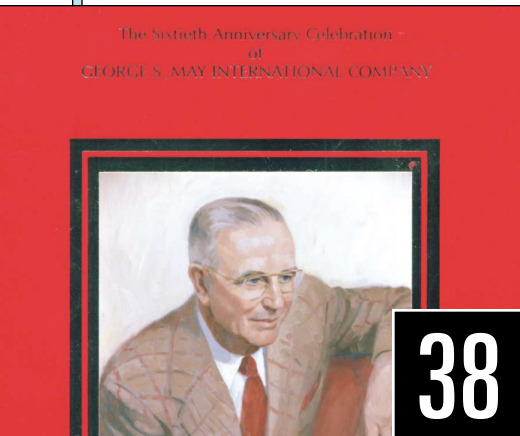
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# Golf Range

M A G A Z I N E

Volume 20, Number 4



April 2012

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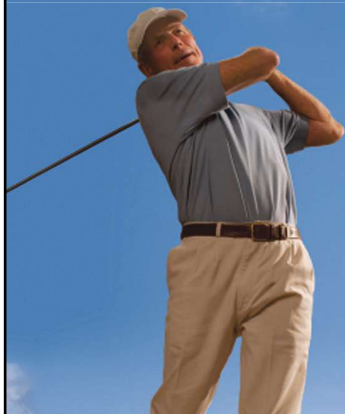
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## Perfecting Your Niche

A convenient reference point for the golf business is the late 1990s, when the sport was booming. For many golf facilities, the business plan was to open the doors and let the golfers find you.

As that point in the past grows farther away, it's worth noting the 180-degree difference in the business plan most successful golf facilities follow today: Find the golfers, then make sure you're giving them what they want.

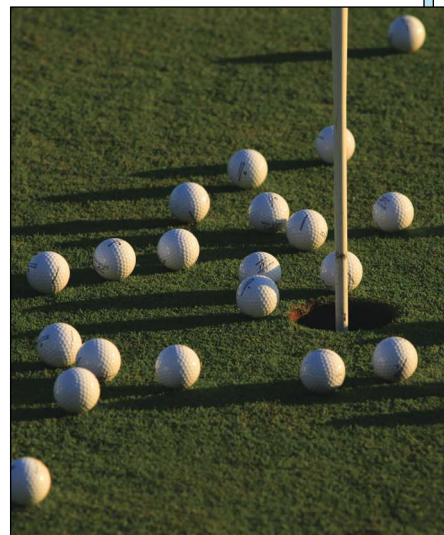
This month's issue highlights a handful of facilities that are using their ranges to do just that. Rather than waiting on a strong economic recovery or hoping that business as usual will start paying overdue dividends, these facilities have undertaken an ongoing process to discover what their best customers want, then continuing to refine those programs to ensure continued success.

Take the example of the Four Seasons Resort & Club in Las Colinas, just outside of Dallas, Texas. As explained in the story that begins on page 26, the resort's golf school has created a high-end niche catering to corporate groups interested in combining business with golf. Learning the game is only part of the plan at the Four Seasons, which gives companies a chance to use the golf school environment as a way to build or deepen relationships between coworkers or clients. By listening to its best customers and becoming more than a place to learn the game, the Four Seasons has tapped into a lucrative revenue stream.

I invite you to look through this month's issue for other great examples of golf ranges that are finding their way to prosperity by refining their focus and offering programs that drive results, including ranges that are finding new ways to capitalize on demo days (page 22).

When it comes to golf facilities, "Build it and they will come" may be a thing of the past. But when it comes to programs and amenities that satisfy your best customers, that approach still holds true.

Rick Summers  
CEO & Publisher, GRAA  
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*Golf Ranges: Where the Fun Starts*






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# Higher Customer Rating Equals Improved Revenue and Profit

Conducting research through customer satisfaction surveys can help you identify ways to power up your range revenues **BY TONY STARKS**

**A**cross the business spectrum, customer satisfaction is a key to success. The happy customer has few reservations when it comes to opening his wallet, and if you're providing a satisfactory service that meets or surpasses their expectations, you're going to reap the rewards.

Case in point: Rolling Hills Golf Course, an 18-hole executive layout in Tempe, Ariz., that recently conducted an in-depth customer satisfaction survey. The results showed that customers who gave the facility the highest marks for customer satisfaction also spent the most money and played the most rounds at the facility on average. This shows a direct correlation between customer satisfaction and how much time and money a golfer spends at your facility (*see chart below*).

To garner the info, Rolling Hills utilized the NGF GolfSAT—a web-based survey platform offered by the National Golf Foundation, which allows operators to extract precise information to gauge customer satisfaction in relation to various aspects of the business by customizing survey questions.

The NGF GolfSAT platform, which can be accessed by any facility for \$395 for a year's time, can be a great tool for

understanding how customers view your range and for gauging the revenue-producing potential of your range. The customization feature of

**Customers who gave the facility the highest marks also spent the most money and played the most rounds on average.**

the NGF GolfSAT allows operators to tailor survey questions and address any area of the operation — such as food-and-beverage or practice ameni-

ties. Also, results can be filtered by golfer type so you can see how you're doing with specific customer groups like women, beginners or first-time visitors to your facility.

If you're giving thought to utilizing this resource, here are a few sample questions you could ask to find out how patrons view the range at your facility:

- How do you rate the turf conditions on our driving range?
- Are you satisfied with the level of service you received from the staff?
- Are the yardage markers on our range accurate?
- Name one amenity we could offer which would encourage you to spend more time at our facility.
- Is our pricing fair?
- If we offered demo equipment for you to use on the range, would you be more inclined to make hard good purchases from us?
- Are you satisfied with the cleanliness and overall atmosphere?
- How do you rate the condition of our range balls?
- What other ranges have you visited in the last year?
- What's the most important element of a good driving range?

If you haven't previously conducted formal customer surveys, don't feel you have to gather all your data in one effort. It's best to plan out two or three survey events so you can check results of policy or service changes. Conducting multiple surveys over a pre-arranged time period will also help you keep each individual survey shorter and more customer-friendly. ■

## Rolling Hills Golf Course Customer Satisfaction Profiles

	Responses	Overall Satisfaction (1-10)	Average Annual Spend
<b>Overall</b>	612	8.5	\$622
<b>Course Rounds</b>			
1-7	355	7.8	\$461
8-24	170	8.4	\$665
25-49	79	9.1	\$1,085
50+	8	9.3	\$2,252

Note that as the "Overall Satisfaction" rate rises, so does the number of rounds played and the "Average Annual Spend."

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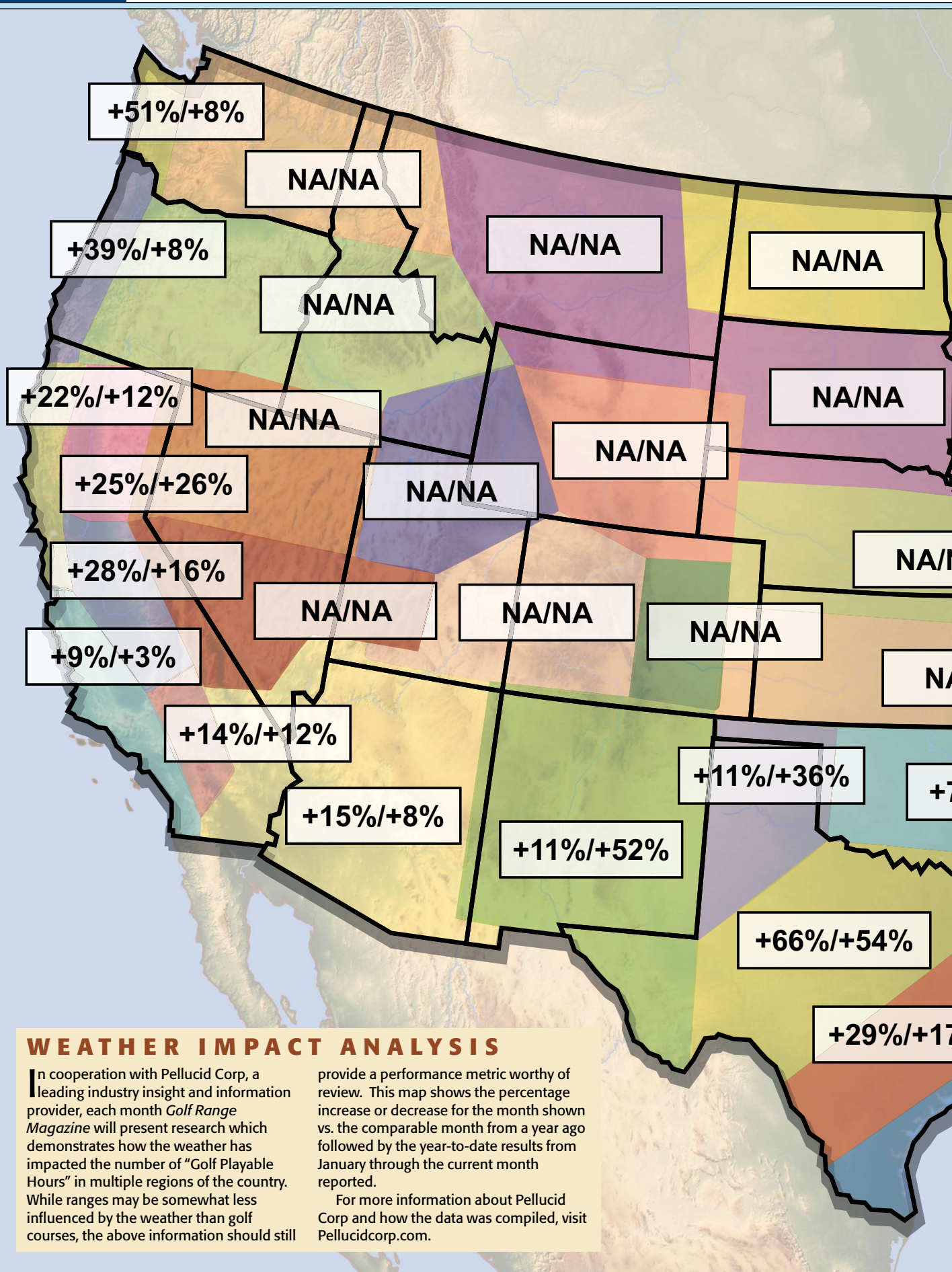
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## WEATHER IMPACT ANALYSIS

In cooperation with Pellucid Corp, a leading industry insight and information provider, each month *Golf Range Magazine* will present research which demonstrates how the weather has impacted the number of "Golf Playable Hours" in multiple regions of the country. While ranges may be somewhat less influenced by the weather than golf courses, the above information should still

provide a performance metric worthy of review. This map shows the percentage increase or decrease for the month shown vs. the comparable month from a year ago followed by the year-to-date results from January through the current month reported.

For more information about Pellucid Corp and how the data was compiled, visit [Pellucidcorp.com](http://Pellucidcorp.com).

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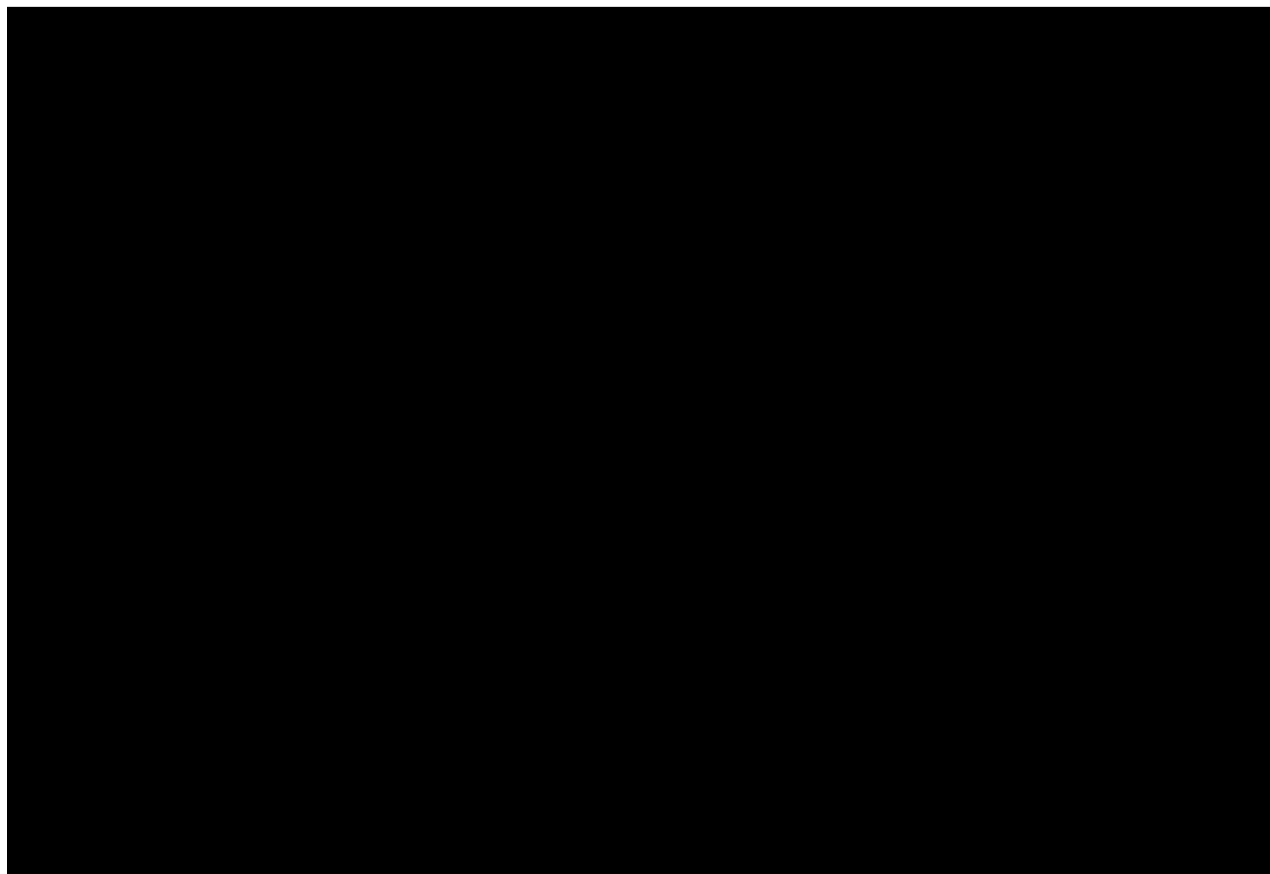
**N/A = out-of-season period  
and not reported**



# Having What It Takes to Sell Hardgoods

Once you've made the investment in fitting systems, stock inventory and gear for measuring swing performance, make sure the customer appreciates your commitment

**T**he video clip in this month's issue shows why Carlsbad Golf Center is a "destination" club fitting center in the Southern California market. Walking you through the hardgoods-vending machinery that has garnered such a slew of awards is Susan Roll, PGA/LPGA head professional and co-owner of the business. On her way to becoming the 2011 PGA National Merchandiser of the Year in the Public Facilities category, Roll has studied enough ball flight to circle the globe a couple of times. She earned 2011 Golf Professional of the Year honors in her section, as well. Videos presented in this magazine don't usually carry warnings, but you may want to prepare yourself for a bout of professional envy, just seeing the inventory, technology and the armada of fitting carts that has helped build Carlsbad Golf Center's reputation. ■





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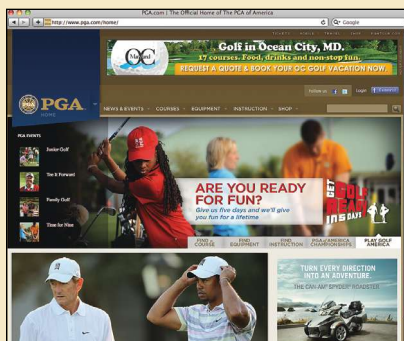
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# A Wide Range of News

Keeping you abreast of what's going in the golf range industry



The PGA of America announced a grant program with the American Society of Golf Course Architects under which architects will consult on course-alteration projects aimed at providing a positive, welcoming experience for beginning golfers. "Our grant to this foundation will provide the necessary travel expenses for ASGCA members who will volunteer to provide free reviews of U.S. golf courses and explain how to work within the existing land plan," said Joe Steranka, PGA of America CEO. "Maybe it's rerouting a hole to expand a range and add in three to six short holes that can be bunny slopes and bring that family out even more to the course." ... **Kirk Hanefeld**, The PGA of America's two-time Senior PGA

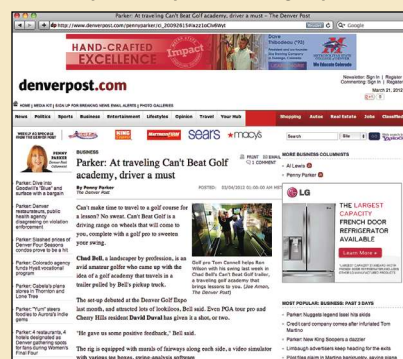


Professional National Champion and 2008 Senior PGA Player of the Year, has been appointed director of instruction at Renaissance and will head up a new state-of-the-art golf academy to be built at the club. Renaissance is one of the premier private clubs located on Boston's North Shore.... The **Wall Street Journal** recently ran an article that provided an interesting



perspective on how golfers can improve their ability. While the range is an integral component, there are other elements at play.... **Vantage Point Holdings LLC** acquired a \$1.5 million loan to build Vantage Point Golf Center – a driving range and 3,600-square-foot clubhouse in Cordova, Tenn., near Memphis. The limited liability company closed on the property and financed it in late February. The LLC's manager/owner, Chris Thompson, who will

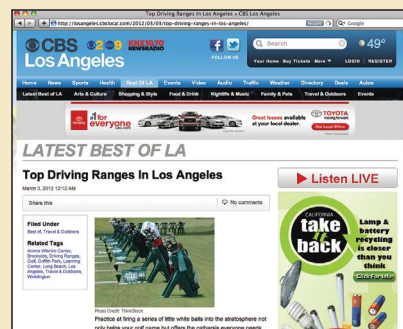
also manage Vantage Point Golf Center, said the company hopes to break ground in the next couple of weeks and complete it by August. The range will have 10 to 15 lighted and heated stalls, but the focus will be on grass driving .... This summer, the **Tradition Club** in Bryan, Texas, is hosting the Aggie Golf School – conducted by the nationally-ranked Texas A&M men's and women's golf teams this summer. The school will take place on the 22-acre practice facility, the Wahlberg Aggie Golf Learning Center (a 6,000 sq. ft. teaching facility featuring two indoor hitting bays and state-of-the-art swing analyzer computer equipment) and the championship Nicklaus designed Traditions Club golf course .... **Can't Beat Golf** is a driving range on wheels that will come to you, complete with a golf pro to



sweeten your swing. Chad Bell, a landscaper by profession, is an avid amateur golfer who came up with the idea of a golf academy that travels in a trailer pulled by Bell's pickup truck. The set-up debuted at the Denver Golf Expo last month, and attracted lots of lookiloes, Bell said. Even PGA tour pro and Cherry Hills resident David Duval has given it a shot, or two. Read more at: Parker: At traveling Can't Beat Golf academy, driver a must - The Denver Post .... If you're looking to keep your game sharp while spending some time in the City of Angels, **CBS Los Angeles** has ranked the Top Driving Ranges in the city.



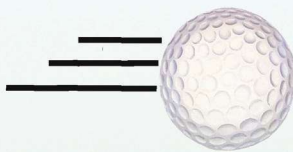
The **Trump Organization** announced that it has purchased Miami's iconic **Doral Resort & Country Club** for \$150 million. Doral is legendary for its four championship golf courses, including the world-renowned Blue Monster; 700-room resort; vast ballrooms and meeting facilities; sprawling spa; and the highly regarded golf school and teaching facilities. The driving range will be lengthened and expanded to more than twice its current size, making it a world-class practice facility.







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# Digital Domination

The consumption of social media and digital information continues to rise **BY TONY STARKS**

For those of you who thought social media was just a trend, like square-headed drivers or, potentially, bellyputters, it's time to wave the white flag and conform. Social media is here to stay, and if you're not participating you're missing out on a conversation that's hundreds of millions strong.

The statistics are staggering. There are more than 845 million Facebook users worldwide; globally, one of every five Internet page views is Facebook; more than 50 percent of the U.S. population uses Facebook or Twitter; and there are 2.7 billion "Likes" every single day on Facebook. Is your facility one of those 2.7 billion?

A new phrase has even been coined to describe this rising segment of the population: Digital omnivores. These are the individuals who always stay connected to the web and their network of contacts either through smartphones, tablets or computers. And in 2011, this group helped Facebook grow its lead over Google as the number one website in terms of time share.



But don't be intimidated by the vastness of social media. From a business standpoint, it's actually a very personalized and communal method of communication. It allows you to easily and efficiently communicate to a group of people who have a special interest in the products and services you're offering.

Take for instance Sittler Golf Center in Kutztown, Pa., which utilizes an extensive social media marketing strategy. Their Facebook page, which has close to 600 followers, is not just a one-way street where they dispense information. They engage their followers through interactive offerings such as golf-related trivia questions and the "Top Fan" feature, which automatically ranks the Facebook

**Follow the Golf Range Association of America on Facebook and Twitter!**



The Golf Range Association of America (GRAA) is integrating all of its digital products, including content from *Golf Range Magazine*, so that it is more convenient for members to access and utilize the information provided by the GRAA. As part of a complete digital strategy, it is important that members expand the conversation that starts in the magazine, best practices and on [GolfRange.org](http://GolfRange.org), onto sites like Facebook and Twitter. Daily updates and continual promotion will provide members with information that will help them grow their business. Follow us at [facebook.com/GolfRangeAssociation](https://facebook.com/GolfRangeAssociation) or [twitter.com/#!/GolfRangeAssoc](https://twitter.com/#!/GolfRangeAssoc).

users who most actively contribute to their page. Periodically, the top fan is rewarded with a free bucket of range balls or a discount in the golf shop.

In addition, Sittler Golf Center uses Facebook and Google+ for advertising. "What I particularly like about advertising on Facebook and Google+

**"This type of marketing targets the people who are most interested in your product."  
— Patty Kline**

## GRAA Awards to be Launched under New Platform

After a short absence, the GRAA Awards are back and ready to bestow accolades on the top range facilities in America. Under new leadership, the Golf Range Association of America has revamped their awards program to include five categories instead of two.

### Those categories are:

- Top 50 Stand Alone Ranges
- Top 50 Public Facility Ranges
- Top 50 Private Facility Ranges
- Top 50 Resort Facility Ranges
- Top 50 Growth of the Game Instructors

The application process has been updated and simplified to a one-page, online form. In addition to filling out the online form, all applicants will be

required to submit a video (not more than three minutes in length) via a YouTube link that describes why they think their facility is deserving of Top 50 status or how they as a golf instructor are growing the game. Applications and videos will then be reviewed by a panel of experts (top range owners, PGA Award winners and top instructors) in each of the categories. The Award winners will be announced in the January issue with an Awards ceremony to be held at the 2013 PGA Merchandise Show. The application process will begin in the late summer. Application forms will be online only at [GolfRange.org](http://GolfRange.org). Check upcoming issues of *Golf Range Magazine* for more information.

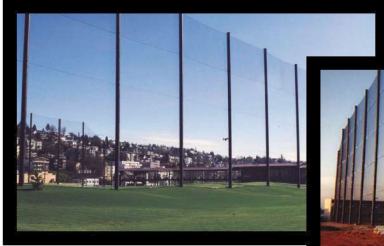
is that you can target specific demographics, both by region and personal interests, so you're not advertising to the whole world," says Patty Kline, who owns Sittler Golf Center along with her husband and PGA Professional Rick Kline. "You're targeting the people closest to your facility that are most interested in your products or services."

As digital consumption continues to rise at an alarming rate, facilities like Sittler Golf Center are positioned to take advantage of it. Make sure your facility is squeezing everything it can out of social media as well. ■

# Any Size Netting System Anywhere



*Hollywood*



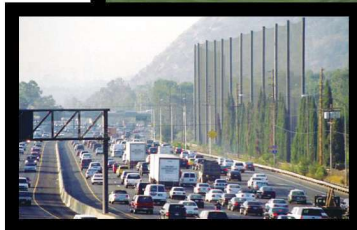
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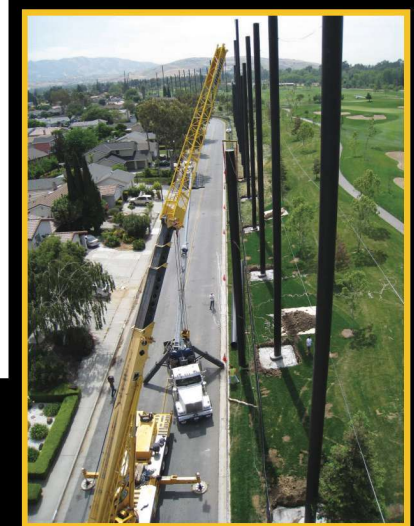
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It takes a well-structured instruction program to keep the Serious Golfer on your side—although when it comes to pricing even this player may want a break.

# Teaching Your Share of Serious Golfers

The high-income, high-frequency golfer who says that score is very important to enjoyment of the game is—or could be—a cornerstone of your instruction program

BY DAVID GOULD

**W**hen a potential student belongs to the Serious Golfer segment of the market, the golf instructor needs to leverage the power of suggestion twice over. Initially, it is to persuade the golfer that formal instruction will upgrade their golf experience significantly. Once that outreach is successful, your task is to have the experienced, score-conscious player accept the swing-change concepts you've devised for him.

Is it necessary to teach the most dedicated players in order to run a successful instruction program? On the private-club side of the industry, the answer tilts toward yes. According to a recent survey of the Serious Golfer population compiled by Golf Datatech, 42 percent of all high-income golfers who play more than once a week say they take lessons from their professional. That still leaves six out of every 10 as a target market for your instruction program, but it also means that if only 20 or 30 percent are in your lesson book you may be under-performing in this area.

This report, commissioned by the Golf Instructor division of New Jersey-based Golf Business Network, notes that 9 in 10 Serious golfers say they are "willing to practice to improve" and 84 percent believe "lessons are valuable in helping

someone improve their game." Indeed, on both the private-club and public-golf side of the ledger, these players are heavy users of the practice

**Among skilled, frequent golfers, 82 percent want to be shown how fitness can improve scoring.**

facilities. No fewer than 77 percent of the club players say they practice on a weekly basis. Among Serious golfers at daily-fee or semi-private facilities, 66 percent say they are

practicing that frequently.

The core golfer from up and down the income scale has lately benefitted from discounted pricing in everything from memberships to green fees to golf travel packages. They also state they are interested in value when it comes to working with a teacher. "Their perception is that lessons are expensive," the report states. "In these economic times they would be more likely to take lessons if they were 20 to 25 percent lower in price."

The more technology filters into golf and into the game-improvement category, the more important it is for instructors to demonstrate competence in these areas, including high-tech clubfitting and exercise physiology. TPI certification and similar credentials are an ideal selling point, given what the Golf Datatech/GBN survey says in this regard. According to the report, physical fitness regimens and golf-specific exercises for golfers are subjects that 82 percent of the survey's 1,577 respondents said they are "interested to learn more about." At the time the research was conducted, only 33 percent had made an effort to pursue this method of improvement. ■

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# Making Demo Day More About The Pro

Major golf gear brands deliver excitement to the local club or course during Demo Day events, but increasingly they're turning the spotlight back onto on-site professionals.

BY STEVE PIKE

**T**he equipment Demo Day is a longtime staple of on-course gear sales. Displaying brand-new woods and irons on the range to a gathering of eager golfers has done plenty to build brand excitement. And if something isn't broke, you don't fix it. That being said, what do you do if it's getting a bit tired?

"The format needs a facelift," one equipment company executive says flatly. "The demo day that's scheduled for next week in any town or city – I can tell you what it's going to look like. There's a tent, tee dividers, and product in a horseshoe with a sales rep standing there asking, 'What would you like to try?'"

But demo days don't have to be like that. In fact, most golf equipment companies today are working hard to make it easier on the PGA professional and his or her staff not only to prepare for one of these events, but to make it pay off as richly as possible. That will happen, they say, if the event is structured to make the

strongest possible impression on customers and members. The new goal is to make a demo day experience resonate with consumers in the following days, weeks and even months.

"A lot of times a Demo Day just generates some interest and people will come back," says Rick McGee, PGA director of golf at the West Palm Beach (Fla.) Golf Course. "If you carry demo product in your shop, customers will come back to try them, especially if it's a big ticket item." Product knowledge can't just come and go with the demo trailer, however. "The more your staff knows and the more up on the particulars they are, the easier it is to



make the sale,” McGee notes.

That all begins with preparation and cooperation from the equipment companies and the facilities. And it's not as simple as a rep showing up with a portable tent and product. “Our outside sales reps handle all of the scheduling of the demo days in their

golfer makes minor swing adjustments. “The more your staff knows and the more up on the particulars they are, the easier it is to make the sale,” McGee says.

Nike Golf backs up its demo events with product training days that it informally calls “tech talks.” Sales reps

nation of swing technique and the right gear. This demo-day wrinkle on the part of Nike Golf helps connect shiny new product and professional instruction in the mind of the golfer. “It’s a natural connection,” says Randle. “We’ve had a lot of professionals say they’ve signed up more students because of demo day.”

At one time, the equipment demo day would spotlight company personnel, promoting the idea that when these experts “parachute in” they bring all the product knowledge with them. Companies like TaylorMade-adidas Golf work to counter that impression by aligning closely with golf professionals. “We typically work with one person at the facility who is on our advisory staff,” says John Oldach, senior manager of consumer trials at TaylorMade-adidas Golf. “We ask that he or she be out there with us all day as a liaison to the membership.” Under this scenario, demo day participants become categorized into active buyers and hot prospects. “Those people who got fit, but didn’t buy product, we’ll give the head professional or assistant all the specs on product those players tried,” says Oldach. “Usually what we see is a lot of residual sales coming in one, two or three weeks later.”

For Bridgestone Golf, a demo day is a bit different from the norm. While it shows off its club line at each demo event, the company actually focuses on ball fitting. Bridgestone Golf basically pioneered ball fitting at demo days a few years ago with the launch of its Tour B330 line of balls. “Our technicians put the club professional staff through the fitting process,” says Corey Consuegra, who runs ball-fitting for Bridgestone Golf. “The professional might be on staff with another club company, but we want to educate them on our golf ball. We tell them we’re not there to break their staff agreement, just let us educate you on the process and the program and how the product affects your member.”

For golf professionals looking to excite the local player, adding Bridgestone Golf’s ball customization to the standard club-selection process is one more way to keep the demo-day stimulus going. ■



The golf range became ground zero for gear selling in the greengrass channel when Demo Day first came along. Now companies and PGA professionals are tweaking the concept.

territories,” says Matt Haneline, who leads the custom fitting/consumer events department at Callaway Golf Company. “They work with the staff to determine what timing works best for them. We run them through a checklist of successful tips and things to do to best promote the Demo Day, take them through the product lineup and tell them what kind of player each club is designed for.”

Nor is it all accomplished on the fly. “This planning occurs on the fall run before the season has even started,” says Haneline. “That sets the ground work. As it gets closer, we send them a Demo Day marketing kit with some sign-up sheets, some table top cards and some posters. We also send out a couple of email blasts and product sales sheets that give the talking points on particular products, such as the RAZR Fit driver.”

That kind of detail is especially important to facility staff as well as Demo Day technicians because of all the adjustable technology in drivers, fairway woods and hybrids. Golfers are wide-eyed at the sight of so much wrench work and adjustability of the drivers and fairway woods they get to sample. However, many will wonder if the club professionals will be able to tweak these specs at a later date as the

arrive on-property to walk the golf staff through the features and benefits of each product the company is bringing to market. Perhaps best of all, Nike Golf does some matchmaker work via its “Swing Zone” feature, in which a select number of demo day customers receive a 10- or 15-minute lesson (featuring Nike Golf product) from the facility’s PGA professional or assistant professional.

## At Nike Golf demo days, a “matchmaker” wrinkle directly boosts lesson revenue for professionals.

“It lets us help highlight and promote the professional,” says Nate Randle, director of marketing at Nike Golf. “The professional loves it because these are quick, one-tip lessons. And when the consumers see the benefits, they’ll say, ‘How much does it cost to take a full lesson?’” Game-improvement has always been a logical combi-





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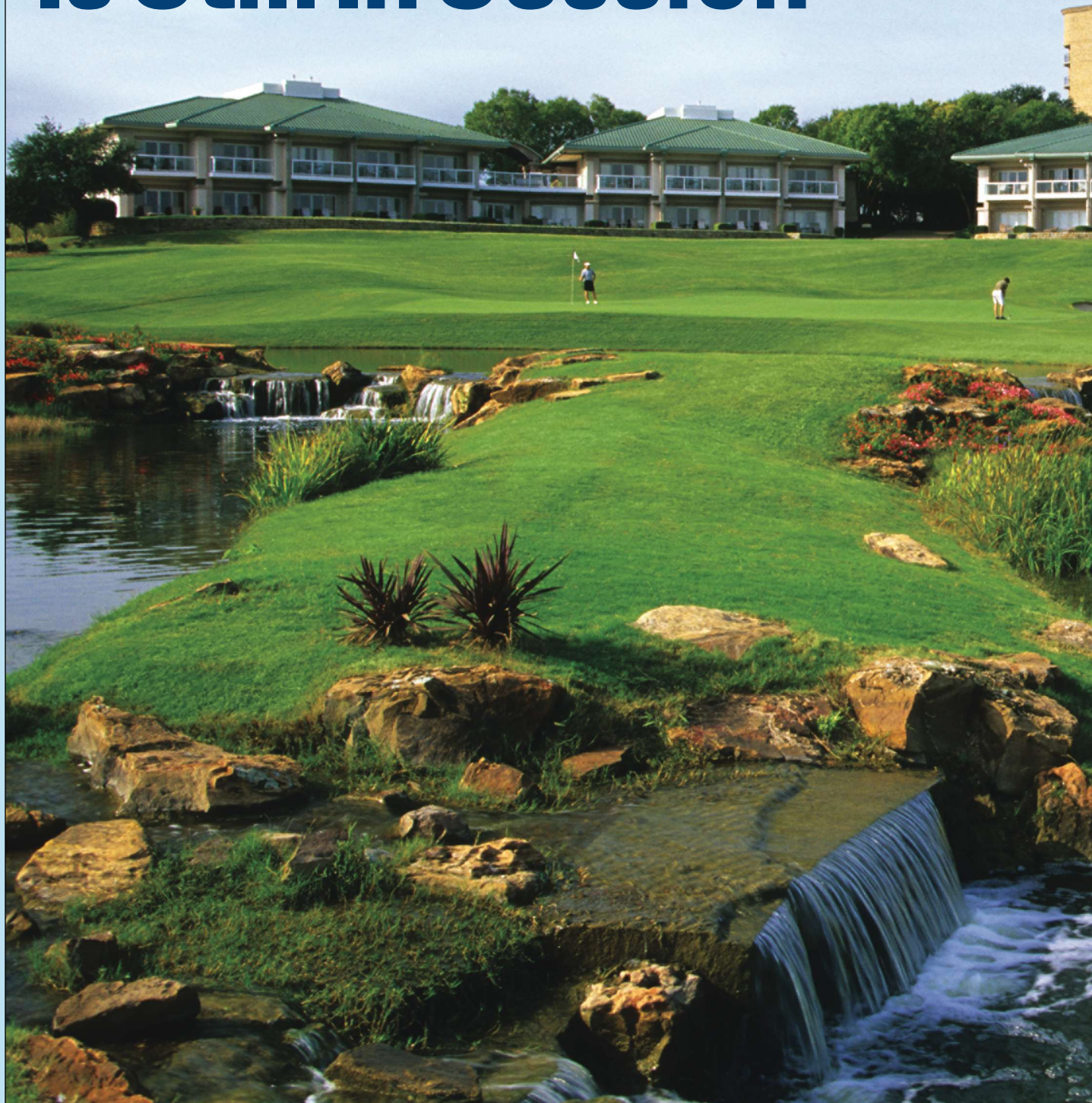
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# Where Corporate Golf Is Still In Session





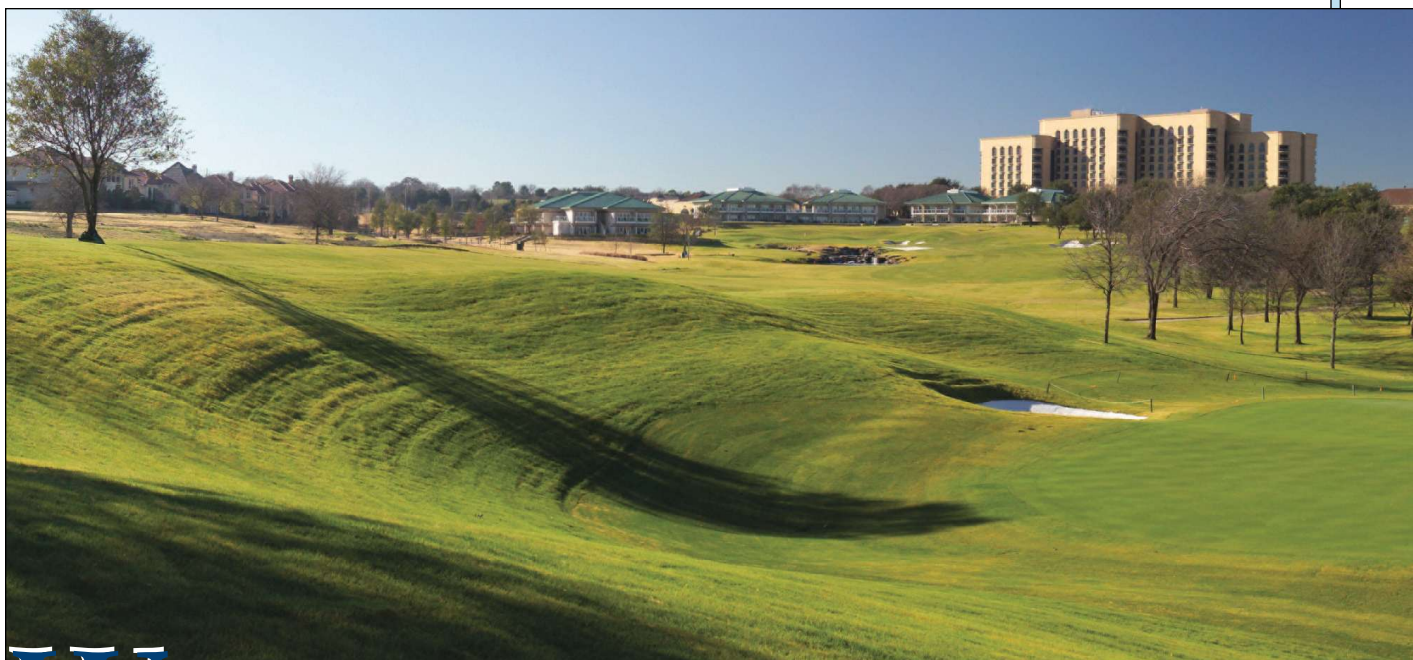
# School



**The glory days of corporate golf events and bond-building golf schools ended abruptly several years ago—except at Four Seasons in Dallas. In case you forgot the formula, here's how they spell success.**

**BY ART STRICKLIN**





**W**hen golf was firing on all cylinders in the late 1990s, corporate spending helped drive the bus and “relationship-building” was its high-octane fuel. Resort golf schools have always focused on client bonding and employee team-building, but few do it in the refined manner of the Four Seasons Resort & Club in the Dallas community of Las Colinas. Its continued success offers proof that the formula can once again work if it’s packaged and delivered with confidence and style.

Originally titled the Byron Nelson Golf School, now known as the Four Seasons Golf School, the enterprise has been going strong for nearly two decades with an upscale, corporate clientele mainly looking for business-golf bonding in a luxurious setting.

“We create, mend and foster relationships among people and companies,” says Tim Cusick, director of instruction at the resort and head of the Four Seasons Golf School. “For three nights and two days we do everything from casual instruction to full-time corporate bonding.” With North Texas a hub of white-collar business and some Fortune 500 companies, the Four Seasons School has a ready-made customer base. When you add the international market accessible via nearby DFW Airport, the draw of the annual PGA Tour event held here each spring, plus the enduring appeal of golf legend Nelson, it’s a powerful combination.

Before the September 11 economic

double-bogey hit, the Four Seasons booked more than a dozen schools yearly at their North Texas facility. Now its number is half that, but slowly climbing back after the Great Recession’s impact from 2008 onward.

**“We are relationships first, golf second. Most schools are the other way around.”**

**— Paul Earnest**

At \$3,700 a student, the resort does show some robust pricing power for its product.

From the start it’s clear that this is unlike most golf schools anywhere in the U.S. For starters, there is no

schedule. Well, that might be slightly incorrect. The Four Seasons golf staff does draw up a detailed schedule for each school, but it’s subject to short-notice changes or complete erasure based on the whims of the host company or its guests. “We are relationship first, golf second. Most schools are the other way around” says Four Seasons director of golf Paul Earnest, who has been with the golf school since the beginning in 1995.

Maybe the pool tournament at Bar 19 went a little late the night before or maybe the CEO needs to buttonhole a key client for a business matter before the clinics begin. It’s all good with the staff and part of the flexibility built into the program. “Where can you get more face time with customers than this environment? The Four Seasons is the facilitator,” says Cusick. “We are very adaptable and will ebb and flow with the needs of the customers. We’re with them from sun-up to sundown.”

Groups average 8-24 players and all attendees stay in the large Four Seasons Villas, just steps from the dedicated golf school building and next to the expansive range and short-game facilities. Their commute is a two-minute stroll, with almost all meals taken in the golf school facility. That gives clients a sense of being a part of the huge resort with the large spa, two resort pools and 36 holes of golf, a Tour-



View from the greensite looking back, along the first hole at the TPC Four Seasons course. At right, club director of instruction Tim Cusick works with a corporate golfer.



nament Players Course (TPC), where the PGA Tour event is contested, and the Cottonwood Valley course. At the same time, they enjoy their own small enclave with privacy and exclusivity.

Breakfast at the golf school building kicks off the first full day of the Four Seasons School, followed by the first morning of instruction held on the

same range PGA Tour players use during their annual May visit for the HP Byron Nelson Championship. After a light lunch, the players are given some more instruction before being taken out for the day-one Horserace competition, a Four Seasons tradition. They are split into two-person teams for a lighthearted match, where partner-

ship is the key and eventually each team is eliminated by a different skills competition leaving one winning two-some. The Four Seasons Awards Ceremony highlights the second

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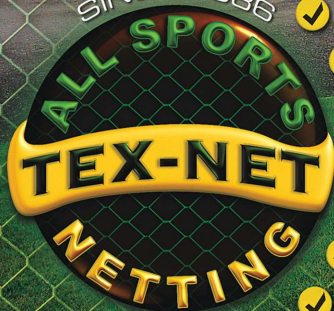
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night's dinner.

There is more golf instruction for day two, followed by another golf school lunch. When the Byron Nelson Golf Schools first started, this is where school namesake and golf legend would appear and tell stories to a rapt audience about his unmatched career. Nelson, who usually would drive himself to the event even at age 90, would stay as long as people would listen to his stories and then take a photo with each participant which would later be autographed.

When he passed away in 2006, there was no way to replicate the great man's presence, but his memory is kept alive richly. That's done mainly in the form of stories now retold by Cusick, Earnest and golf school

lead instructor Jay Winegar. "We do instruction all day, but it doesn't just have to be golf instruction all the time," says Earnest. "Paul and I still have a lot of Byron Nelson stories," Cusick added. The golf sponsor instruction phase is capped by an 18-hole day-two mini-tournament on the TPC Four Seasons Championship Course, often with the tournament fixtures in place and even hotel guests turning out to form a sparse gallery.

When the players return to their villas each night, they find a different golf gift left by the Four Seasons golf staff or the sponsoring corporation. It's all part of the more-is-more approach that a corporate-sponsored golf program on the range needs to be all about. ■

## LEST WE FORGET THAT TOUR PROS ARE PICKY

**F**ile this under Unusual Range Duties at PGA Tour Events: Along with working corporate golf schools, Cusick also helps set up the practice facilities for PGA Tour players each spring. Starting early Monday morning and continuing until the next Sunday, the world's best golfers line up to pound golf balls on the resort's 80 yard x 100 yard wide range and make daily use of the large practice putting green and short game practice area.

"They are there all the time before they play, after and every time in-between," Cusick says.

Unlike when he first started working there nearly a decade ago, each golf manufacturer now will bring their own balls and swing alignment machine and players can choose from seven different

kinds of balls all attuned to their own clubs or sponsor brands. "It's just taking it to the next level," Cusick says. During tournament week, the players will hit approximately 125,000 balls, all retrieved, cleared and sorted into their individual brand buckets by Four Seasons staff and tournament volunteers.

Golf school amateurs and tour pros alike will put in full-swing time on the range, but the pros will use the short game area as much or more as the driving range. The amateurs may hit a half dozen putts at best before they play. "The pros love the short game area and putting green. We enlarged it a couple of years ago and during the tournament last year we had 51 golfers on it and it didn't look full," Cusick says.



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# Catching Golfers in Your Website

Ranges like Man O'War Golf Learning Center take a workhorse approach to their websites—making sure that customer data, engagement and revenue are top priorities. **BY MIKE CULLITY**

**F**or the past three years, Man O'War Golf Learning Center has pushed hard to engage potential customers as they surf the Internet. The results of that effort speak volumes.

A learning, practice and retail facility in Lexington, Kentucky, Man O'War has increased its customer e-mail database nearly threefold to 7,500 addresses since a 2009 website redesign, says director of operations Tyler VanHoose. Offering incentives such as free instructional guides and sweepstakes entries in exchange for visitors' contact information, the Man O'War site uses video to provide golf tips from staff professionals and highlight services such as custom club-fitting and repair.

Valuable, engaging content is king, say the Web wizards—Man O'War takes that to heart. It markets to its database with periodic e-mails that promote by educating. For example, it will use a pro's tips on choosing the best ball for your game to advertise a ball sale. And to expand its database

further, the facility plans to unveil a new site this spring that will better integrate with the social-media site Facebook, VanHoose says.

Although other factors have contributed to business growth, Man O'War's online strategy has played an important role in the facility doubling its revenues since 2005. The message these gains demonstrate is how much revenue upside can be tapped by web-savvy operators, despite how overwhelming it can sometimes be to keep pace with all the cutting-edge bells and whistles online. A few tips to make your web site a revenue-driving tool:

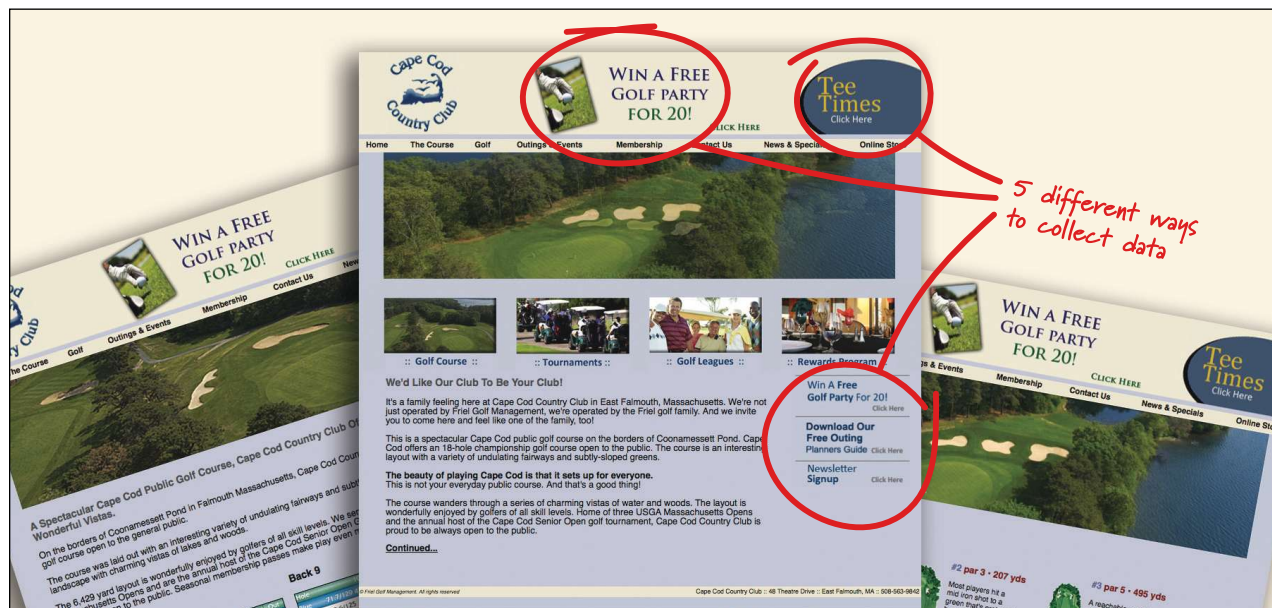
- **Offer value to engage:** To forge connections with potential customers online, offer them something of value. An ethical bribe, such as a free instruction booklet or entry in a lesson giveaway in exchange for contact infor-

mation, can be an effective icebreaker.

"My recommendation is that on the home page of your website, you should have at least five different ways of starting a relationship," says Andrew Wood, CEO of Legendary Marketing, a Florida firm that has built websites for Man O'War and other golf properties.

Posting educational videos is another way to engage customers. "Most golf professionals are very comfortable in front of a camera, but a lot of times they can be hesitant to put that video on their own website," says Zach Miller, director of golf business development for Imavex, an Indiana web development firm. "I think sometimes they feel like they might be giving away secrets, but essentially what you're doing is engaging the end user and building your brand."

- **Use content to build trust:** Although it's been well-documented that Internet users have short attention spans—Miller cites research showing that visitors who can't find what



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they're looking for on a site in two to eight seconds will leave the site—earning customers' business online requires thoughtful content that inspires trust.

Online shoppers "abandon their carts" because they're not convinced the seller will provide value, Wood believes. As such, it usually takes more than a few bullet points of copy to convince a golfer to book a lesson online. "You might need to have a three-page sales letter," Wood says. "Or, for the people who don't read, you might need a five-minute video."

Giving potential customers a way to request more information through an online form that generates an e-mail alert—and responding to those alerts with a timely phone call—can help close the deal. "Calling them as soon as you can after they submit that form leaves quite an impression," Miller says.

• **Meet customers where they are:**

With more and more people using smartphones and social media, it's imperative for facilities to be accessible in these arenas. Creating a mobile version of your website that offers

quick information—such as phone numbers, directions, schedules and rates—can attract on-the-go customers. And launching a Facebook fan page, which allows you to share

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**"On the home page of your website, you should have at least five different ways of starting a relationship"**  
— Andrew Wood

---

information with users who "like" your facility and those users' friends, can expand your reach exponentially.

Frequent posting on Facebook provides golf courses and ranges with an opportunity to remain top-of-mind among fans and their friends. And posts should strive to entertain—

think golf videos, golf jokes and golf articles—not necessarily sell. "A lot of business people think, 'All I can do is put up pro shop specials, range specials or lesson specials,'" Wood says. "Ranges are in the entertainment business, so whatever you can do to entertain your customers is going to help you engage them."

Recognizing the power of Facebook but lacking staff resources to devote to it, one range owner recently hired an independent marketing contractor to post updates. "We were trying to keep the Facebook thing going, and we realized weeks would go by and we didn't update it," says Rob Brilliant, owner of Severna Park Golf Center in Arnold, Md. "I needed someone who was on it all day long."

And by integrating its Facebook fan page with its new website, Man O'War will seek to fuel continued growth. "When people 'like' us on Facebook, it will send them directly to our website, where they can put their name, e-mail and phone number in," Van Hoose says. "We get a 'like' on Facebook and we capture their e-mail, so now we can market to them." ■



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# Shagging in Self-Defense for George S. May's Pros

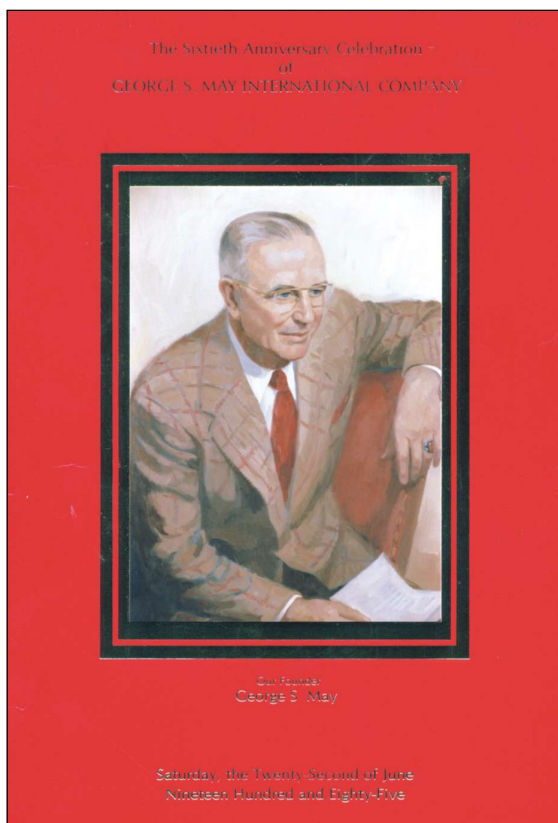
Looking back fondly on the era when caddies risked serious injury to retrieve practice balls **BY AL BARKOW**

**G**eorge S. May, the business innovator who owned the Tam O'Shanter club and helped make pro golf a major-league attraction, was one of the reasons golf got in my blood at an early age. I was among the many Chicago kids back in the 1950s who ventured up to Niles, Illinois to caddie at "Tam"—most eagerly during the annual series of big-money events May would host.

For two weeks every summer from the mid-1940s through 1958 the tournaments brought players and fans in droves to May's well-groomed golf course. First came the Tam O'Shanter All-American, followed a week later by the Tam O'Shanter World Championship. The All American doubled the standard \$10,000 total purse of the time, and by 1954 the World paid an unthinkable first prize of \$50,000. A true pioneer of the sport, May was the first to broadcast golf nationally on television and the first to erect temporary grandstands.

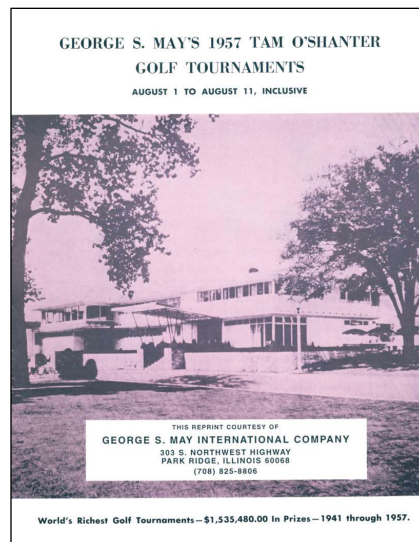
It was exciting to tote a bag down the fairways in a tournament with that big a purse, but it was downright spine-tingling to handle the caddie's chore of ball-shagging during your player's practice sessions. I should pause to point out how different golf ranges were back then. Before the invention of the automatic picker, a golfer hit shots and his caddie shagged them. A kid with baseball aspirations brought his mitt and took fly-ball practice. At The Masters in that era, the jocks carried

big white towels and used them to snag practice shots out of the air. When a Snead or even a young Nicklaus carried the tall fence at the



back end of Augusta National's old range, they would wave that towel exultantly, while the gallery oohed and aaahed.

At Tam O'Shanter, I got my first



Mementos of the post-War tournament series that pro-tour pioneer George S. May hosted at his club outside Chicago.

looks at players from overseas like Peter Thomson, Roberto DeVicenzo and Bobby Locke. Of course the U.S. pros turned out—names like Sam Snead, Ben Hogan and Cary Middlecoff, but also names perhaps only I remember, Paul O'Leary, Leo Biagetti and the other field-fillers.

The only weak spot in Mr. May's festival grounds was the practice range, which was no wider than a standard fairway. You could see it from the clubhouse veranda, tucked between No. 1 and No. 18 fairway. From 8 a.m. until early afternoon a firing squad of 40-plus golfers would stand at one end hitting shots. For us caddies it was like standing in the open during a carpet-bombing air raid. In hindsight we should have worn helmets, flak jackets or perhaps a suit of armor. Just getting into position with your standard-issue shag bag was an act of bravery, though we were constantly prepared to take evasive action.

No one was fool enough to stand 70 or so yards out in the middle of the range to catch the wedge shots—not when other players were drilling balls straight up the gorge, or valley of death. We would take up



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positions along the edge of the range, dashing over and back, until our player got into the longer clubs. By then you could find us beyond the target green 200 yards out in a grove of tall, leafy trees. That felt marginally safer, unless most of the pros had drivers in hand. Under those conditions the balls would rattle around in the branches overhead then rain down into long grass where they would have to be pounced on quickly. It was like standing beneath a shattering chandelier.

All the jocks called out warnings to each other when they spotted their

pro's ball, or another's, descending out of the blue. Still, more than a few shoulders and shins were nicked on the fly, and plenty of bouncers were fielded with a stomach or a schnozz. That we never seemed to suffer a serious injury is beyond understanding. Shag bag inventories took a good hit, however. It was not easy to keep track of your man's ball when you were ducking and covering up against incoming artillery, and losses could be substantial.

A shag bag was not only a tool of the trade, it was a symbol of one's competitive skills and its contents were a mark of relative financial status. The elite Snead worked out of a bag of 60 or 70 shiners, balls he used for a few holes during a round then relegated to practice. If he ran low he would nonchalantly open a box of new ones and add them in the mix—a stunning sight to young caddies who might have played for years and never owned a new golf ball. Lesser mortals, such as John Barnum, a threadbare amateur whom I looped for one summer, didn't have such luxury. After two weeks of the Tam O'Shanter competitions Barnum was not pleased when on the last day of our stint together I dumped out about 25 stained balls from what had been

45 or so. He glared at me and sputtered: "What happened to my shag bag!!?" I made just the minimum wage that go-around.

## When the practice tee was lined with pros, just standing at the 200-yard mark was an act of bravery.

I went on to make a life for myself in golf, as a writer, magazine editor, television producer and here and there a tournament player. After Ted Lockie invented the rolling picker attachment, driving ranges lost the sense of adventure they held for us Tam O'Shanter caddies. On the other hand, the opportunity for golfers to practice grew exponentially and the national average handicap probably dropped by at least a stroke. Which made for a reasonable trade-off, on the whole. ■



Sam Snead

# Club analysis redefined.

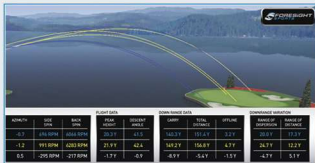


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