

## **Section 2 - Marketing Theory for Golf Clubs (practical application is detailed in S4)**

### **2.1. Introduction.**

This document is not intended as a set of notes for those taking marketing examinations, but a practical look at marketing in the context of the business where the principal income is from the attraction of members or visitors to use the services it provides. In today's UK Golf Club this means members and green-fee payers, in the USA the balance is quickly swinging to a greater reliance on the latter. The UK will inevitably follow this trend, not only because we tend to mimic what the USA does, but because of economic trends we shall discuss later. The USA is many years ahead in their acceptance of the need for and the delivery of quality marketing and have identified that it is the most important element in a plan to ensure the future good health of the club. A much quoted Simon Wells, who made a very large fortune out of furniture retailing reputedly said: "Assuming that the product is OK, 99% of business success is down to marketing. You can have the greatest idea, product or service – but no customers, no future" In most golf clubs the product is of an overall reasonable standard, but the marketing is often at the other end of the scale.

### **2.2 What is Marketing?**

There are many definitions of marketing, but one simple definition is that it encompasses any activity that helps towards making your customers more satisfied. However, there are still a lot of clubs that consciously do an awful lot to make their customers dissatisfied! I would add to the simplistic definition two requirements: 1. Energy and 2. The ability to transmit enthusiasm. Every successful marketing manager has those qualities in abundance. In this section I shall outline the main elements that are particular to golf clubs although, because there will be special circumstances in some clubs, the topic list is by no means exhaustive. Later I shall offer some examples/ideas that can be applied to many clubs. The most essential 'Marketing' imperatives for a golf club include:

a. Good Product Description: Make absolutely certain that you identify your unique selling points (USPs) and make them the basis of all your efforts to communicate with your customers. If your course is flat and particularly easy to walk around that is a valuable USP. Conversely, if the course is hilly and very challenging, that too can be a USP. If you have good drainage and your course is open when those around you are closed, that is a valuable USP. Identify these assets and always use them to best advantage. Try to use your USPs or a related phrase in your main description. "Packaging" of the product is a key marketing decision and essential in building your brand.

b. Know your customers: Surveying your existing members will give you valuable information about your main existing customer base. From analysis of this information you can make valid assumptions about the market potential in your area. It is true to say that very few clubs have any real information on their existing members and even less on casual customers. There may have been 1000

green fee customers over the previous six months, but the majority of clubs could not tell you the name, postal or e-mail address of any of them. If they have been customers in the past they may need very little prompting to make another visit and an e-mail advising of special offers could tip the scales.

c. Survey your customers and identify their needs: A major fault with many golf clubs is a failure to identify what their customers want from their club. Indeed, many clubs are guilty, albeit unconsciously, of telling their customers what they ought to require. This was absolutely the case in my first club and you will see evidence of such practice wherever you go.

d. Positively Involve Existing members: Like it or not, every member of a golf club is involved in marketing, whether that involvement be negative or positive. Failure to meet the aspirations of existing members can have a major impact on recruitment. Every one of them will meet potential customers on a regular basis and their satisfaction level will transmit to a very wide audience. Try to ensure that it is a good one and they convey a positive image. A good organisation will positively promote a marketing attitude among its members/employees. No-one would suggest going to the lengths undertaken by some Japanese companies, but as much as we may scorn them, they are very effective. As a minimum, every member of the club should be given the opportunity to learn of the importance of marketing to their club. Section 4 offers the best way of achieving this marketing imperative.

e. Use Modern Communication Protocols: We live in an age of instant communication. A few years ago a letter of inquiry would be brought by the postman and would be answered after a few days in the tray. Today communication is almost instant. If you receive an e-mail it will have been written just a few minutes earlier and the inquirer will expect to receive an answer with similar urgency. If you leave it a few days or even hours, the chances are the inquirer will have gone elsewhere, persuaded by a more efficient respondent. Make certain that you are easy to contact. In compiling a database of UK clubs it was soon apparent that some clubs, probably quite unknowingly, live with a nightmare e-mail address. Remember! One typo in an e-mail address can cost you a customer or perhaps four! Make it easy and friendly. How about: "playgolf@.....golfclub.co.uk" Welcoming and significantly better than a long address riddled with hyphens.

f. Make best use of Technology: Web sites and tablet/smart phone apps have gone from unusual to very common in a short space of time. Most customers in the younger age group and many in the 'silver surfer' category use technology as their prime source of information. Most golf clubs have a web site, but a quick scan of a few will show that they do nothing to differentiate their product from others and are not updated on a regular basis. Currency is vital.

g. Determine the Price: Price is a marketing decision and one of the most difficult facing the marketing professional. To make your product less price sensitive, make sure that it is: 1. Highly differentiated from the competition- i.e. there is a real USP. 2. Seen as being of a quality that has few rivals – this mark of quality will be associated with the product's features and the services provided.

h. Promote the Product: Advertising is an obvious way of promoting the product. However, of equal importance is a general PR effort involving newspaper publicity supported by a host of other PR methods. All demand good clear copywriting and targeted placement. I shall offer some practical advice later in this document. Strive for high quality - A Target for Club Management: (If the choice is between poor quality and nothing. Take Nothing. Poor quality can define your whole operation. This covers all aspects of your operation including the food you serve. Many clubs have a great course but overcharge for poor quality food. The golfer goes away forgetting the golf, but will certainly remember the food!)

2.3. Marketing is a science, but above all good marketing is a product of common sense. It is a management function mastered by very few but one with which everyone has daily contact. Most of us make our decisions based on knowledge and experience accumulated through daily life. Why should marketing be different? We know what pleases and displeases us and if we apply that knowledge to our relationship with our customers we shall not go far wrong.