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As the dust starts to settle on the 2014 club year, many Golf Clubs are now deeply involved in tackling the issues that have become a serious concern. Those concerns are universally greater than in recent years and there is no hope that they will be allayed without strong management action. Most clubs will consider their marketing strategy because it is the element of golf club management that is most likely to be under-performing. Customers, be they members or visitors, may not specifically identify marketing deficiencies, but every single management deficiency they perceive is in some way a marketing failure. No business can get everything right, but particularly in the area of marketing, some golf clubs have a very long way to go before they get more right than they get wrong. This under-performance may be attributable to inadequate management, but in a lot of clubs it owes more to simply adhering to tradition, with little or no allowance made for fast evolving changes in the market. Simply put, what you could get away with in the past is no longer tenable.

You will find this package brutal in some areas and alive with truths that some would prefer not to recognise. This is not by accident. Not accepting the reality of the problem will almost certainly result in more tinkering around the edges when the overriding need is for an in-depth examination followed by resolute action to forge a new direction to meet changed market circumstances.

**Before you move on, etch this imperative into your every thought:**

**“Our Golf Club is essentially a business and we exist to sell our product to customers – If our business fails, all other aims and aspirations fail with it”**

**Section 1 – Introduction**

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### The Story of Farmer Giles

1.8.1. In the same way that history has a bearing on marketing, it has also had a marked impact on standards of management. Consider the effect on finances and thus today's membership numbers of failure to make sensible management decisions over the past 70 or so years. Let me tell you a story using the example of Farmer Giles who was a member of your club and of your committee over many years. Yes he was! In truth you have probably had several 'Farmers Giles' in the history of the club.

1.8.2. Farmer Giles has 120 acres of land on which he grows crops and maintains a small herd of milking cows. Until the mid-1940s he did a lot of his work using good old 'Dobbin', a delightful Suffolk Punch, and he needed his staff of six herdsmen and labourers to run an efficient operation. Being a respected local farmer and a Mason with a Meerschaum pipe, a tweed jacket and a nice car, he was well respected in the area and was the ideal candidate to be elected to your committee and become a leading light in running your 120 acre golf course and advising your six greenskeepers on how to maintain the grass and take care of your 'Dobbin'.

1.8.3. After WWII, Farmer Giles invested in a Fordson tractor to start a programme of mechanisation that would make his operation more efficient. He paid for the tractor through cutting a member of staff and improving general efficiency. He persuaded your golf club committee to buy a tractor to replace your horse (Because it was quieter, you bought a Ferguson standard even though it was more expensive). Without demur from Farmer Giles you paid for your tractor by increasing members' fees. Gradually and in parallel both the golf club and the farm saw increased mechanisation and as they did so

Farmer Giles reduced his labour force and thus his costs still further. You simply raised membership fees and tried to find other work for the redundant staff. The introduction of very large and expensive agricultural machines brought about the advent of specialist contractors who could justify the investment in heavy plant because they would do work for many smaller businesses. Farmer Giles employed the contractors to cut his corn with their combine harvester and to cut and bail his hay. By this means he cut his staff costs still further. Following Farmer Giles's advice, you employed contractors to complete many annual tasks where expensive machinery was desirable. Under the guidance of Farmer Giles, you continued to find alternative work for your over-sized labour force.

1.8.4. Over the years, Farmer Giles developed a good business model with a very lean labour force that has seen his business prosper. He was using his own money. During the same period, he and his friends introduced mechanisation at your golf club, but because it was easier to raise fees than to cut the labour force, you simply allowed the task to be spread around so that everyone had something to do. In this case, Farmer Giles and his friends were using someone else's money. The consequence is that Farmer Giles now has two members of staff and in the unlikely event that he requires additional labour he employs someone on a temporary basis. How many staff do you have? Almost certainly the same number that you have always had and they have followed the classic "Parkinson" model as they have grown the task into the time available. We all know that in reality the task has not grown but that the additional time has been used to remove the need for management. Whereas each day once demanded task allocation and management, the fairways are now cut because it is Tuesday whether or not it needs doing. To do otherwise leaves a spare man for whom there is no task. The real message here is that committees should apply the same criteria to spending money whether it is their money or the money of others. Almost never is that the case.

**A word of warning!** If you do hire marketing advice, make certain that the consultant you select has a deep understanding of golf, golfers and golf clubs. A generic consultancy will probably charge you in excess of £1000 per day for which you will get a smart presentation, a lot of jargon and buzz words, but very little valid practical advice.

## Section 2 - Basic Marketing Theory for Golf Clubs

2.1. This document is not intended as a set of notes for those taking marketing examinations, but a practical look at marketing and associated management issues in the context of industries whose principal income is from the attraction of members or visitors to use the services they provide. 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 simply because we tend to mimic what the USA does, but because of economic trends that we shall discuss later.

2.2. 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 low end of the scale.

### What is Marketing?

2.3. Marketing is defined in many ways, but one simple definition is that **marketing encompasses any activity that helps towards making your customers more satisfied**. However, everyone reading this will have experience of clubs that consciously do an awful lot to make their customers dissatisfied! One should add to the basic definition the requirements for **Energy** and the ability to **Enthuse**. If the member(s) responsible for your marketing effort do not have these qualities, your chances of success are small.

This section outlines 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 it offers 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 them 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.

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.

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 many are not updated on a regular basis. Currency is vital. Avoid template sites like those sold by HowdidIdo.com. They are better than nothing, but from a marketing standpoint they leave a great deal to be desired. Avoid any template that has a large form to be completed to contact your club. People HATE filling in forms! Offer an e-mail address where they can contact you. OK! You will get some spam but if you deter spam you will also be deterring those people you want to contact you. Forms are technically clever, but from a marketing standpoint they are just plain stupid.

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:

- i. Highly differentiated from the competition- i.e. there is a real USP.
- ii. Seen as being of a quality that has few rivals – this mark of quality could be associated with the product's features and the services provided. Perhaps services suggested in this paper that you do not currently offer.

h. Is your membership ceiling realistic? In this context, many clubs have membership ceilings that are perhaps unrealistic given the state of the market. A limit of, say 600 members, may have been great in the days when fees could be kept at a level that could produce enough income to support the operation. Today there are clubs that operate successfully with 850+ members on more affordable fees in order to generate the necessary income. Market circumstances will dictate which scenario is right for which club.

j. 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.

### Section 3 - The Challenges on the Horizon

3.1. It is worth repeating that golf club memberships have fallen by some 100,000 over the past 11 or so years. Many reasons have been offered, the principal of which is the economic downturn. Forecasters say that the economy is unlikely to improve before 2016 at the earliest; I prefer the optimism of those who look at historic economic cycles and see early 2014 as the turning point. The natural response by club managers is to believe that when the economy improves, there will be an upturn in membership applications. Almost certainly this is wrong and the downward trend may well continue or at best hold steady. Why?

3.2. For many years society has seen the benefit of record low interest rates. Money has never been cheaper. During this period salaries have remained depressed and some have improved very little for more than ten years. At the same time, low interest rates have encouraged substantial financial commitment, not least mortgages taken out by those very people who are or might become golf club members. When the economy starts to recover, interest rates will rise and as someone who was hit by 16% interest rates in the early 1980s, I can say with certainty that every 1% hits like a blow from Mike Tyson. Generally, middle class homeowners are the core of a golf club's membership and although the interest rate rises will probably be modest, they will certainly precede any improvement in incomes and they may cause many to think about whether they can justify the expense of golf club membership. Moreover, following a recession, consumers are psychologically damaged and often unwilling to make financial commitments in the fear that there might well be another financial blow just around the corner.

3.3. To add to the overprovision problem, there will be new golf complexes coming on stream. Hotel chains in particular recognize the advantages of having sports facilities associated with their hotels. They may be full of travellers and business people during the week, but there is also the possibility of a lucrative trade at weekends through the provision of golf breaks. The hotel chains will be, not too far in the future, the supermarkets of the golf industry. Already they offer flexible national packages that are prima facie attractive, but less so when examined more closely. In a couple of years time they will be going global with these packages, the international dimension adding even more attraction for certain categories of golfer. Because golf is not their core activity, there is every prospect that these hotel chains will be able to force price reductions in the market, similar to those of the giant supermarkets that have caused the demise of many of our conventional retail outlets. Currently, hotel chains and other casual golf companies are building a new golfing culture that could threaten the traditional golf club scene more quickly than club management committees may understand. Crown Golf is becoming a major player in the market, with c 20 venues around the UK and, similarly, International Hotel Group is growing very quickly. There is still time to take action to mitigate the effects on your club, but they will not give you forever. Something to bear in mind in this context is that England Golf (EG) is not exclusively your friend in this competition. One only has to read the EG publication to see that the organisation promotes the development of 'Golf'. Not 'Golf Clubs'! If that development is via Crown,



IHG or De Vere, at the expense of traditional clubs, the EG will not be standing at your graveside shedding tears!

Also of importance, it is attractive to come at the problem from the other direction by adding a hotel or chalet accommodation to a complex providing a golf course, bowling-green, tennis and squash courts and perhaps fishing lakes. From whichever direction the problem arrives, it will certainly challenge all but the super-efficient stand-alone golf club.

**Take, at your peril, the view that these problems will not affect you and that action is not required. Remember, you are a business that exists to sell a product to customers. Every business needs a constant marketing effort.**

## Section 4 - A look at Marketing Practicalities

### 4.1. Your USP(s)

When discussing USPs with some managers, the first response is “we don’t really have any.” You almost certainly do. What made you join the club? Since you have been a member, what things have most pleased you? Look at course features, location, weather history, year-round condition, practice facilities, clubhouse etc. Somewhere there are features that differentiate you from your competitors that you can use to promote your brand image. Define them and start building. Do not necessarily accept that what you have lived with for a hundred years is still valid in the market place. It may be, but times have changed.

The remainder of this section is available only to purchasers of the full package and contains among other topics:

1. How to determine and use your best USPs.
2. Developing customer participation.
3. Improving visitor experience and encouraging loyalty.
4. Capitalising on course facilities.
5. Our successful marketing future - Already the successful present elsewhere, not least in a club in the USA. Learn how this former members-only club now takes \$1.2m annually in green fees. ( fully documented here.)
6. Your professional and his part in your progress. How to improve your marketing and save £15K -£30K in the process.
7. Your greens staff.
8. Pricing to maximise income.
9. Building a 'sticky customer' clientel.
10. How to maximise green fee income.
11. Best practice in booking facilities.
12. Payment methods optimised.
13. Using your assets to best advantage.
14. Using your biggest local and national marketing spenders to advertise your product free of charge.

15. Developing the most user-friendly communications.

Section 5 - Survey your Customers & Involve them in Marketing

5.1. Do ask your customers what they want. Telling them what they should want is a thing of the past, or should be. Surveying them and meeting their aspirations will promote a positive attitude that they will convey to others.

5.2. Affinity Groups – A Valuable Marketing Asset

In many clubs affinity groups like the Ladies, Seniors and Spin-ups have for years been denigrated by management committees. The origins of this denigration are lost in time, but it is a crass attitude that has no place in the modern club. Indeed, such affinity groups are the core of many clubs and will grow in importance in years to come. The population is ageing and the retired members generally have:

- a. Time to play that makes their membership fee outlay a worthwhile investment.
- b. A financial standing that is free from mortgage interest and a disposable income that is more predictable than those in today's workplace.
- c. The time and willingness to help in the running of the club and maintenance of facilities.

Can you deny this fact? If the law would permit, you could create a successful golf club with a lower age limit of 55 years! You could certainly not create one with an upper age limit of 55 years! Accordingly, there is much to be said for targeting some of your advertising at those who are retired or are about to be so. Good reasons for doing so include:

- i. At the end of one's working life there is the all-pervading threat of a void that needs filling and many are desperate to make certain they have something to occupy their time.
- ii. Many of those about to retire will already have considered golf as a retirement hobby. They just need a prompt.
- iii. Retirement often brings with it the financial benefits that make entry into a comparatively expensive sport a possibility.
- iv. Mrs "he's about to retire" will be urging him to take up a hobby or a sport. The threat of having him mope around the house is very real. Unlike many sports, golf can be a husband and wife joint interest.
- v. Retired golfers are much more likely to be drawn to club membership rather than playing as casual golfers.

Establish a Seniors' section. This is a growing sector of the market at a time when other areas are in decline. You can market a seniors section, but you cannot sell what you don't have.

### 5.3. Spin-Ups

Spin-ups provide a valuable entry point for new members. As someone who has been a 'new member' at a lot of clubs, I must emphasise that a deterrent to joining any group is uncertainty about whether integration will be easy. This is particularly the case with those who are new to golf and joining their first club. A good marketing tool is to invite potential new members to join the spin-up for a trial round. It may just tip the balance and it costs you nothing.

### 5.4 Communication.

Many organisations are notoriously bad at communication, both with members and dealing with outside enquiries. As already emphasised, we live in an 'instant' world. We order something on-line and we expect immediate dispatch and fast delivery. If we make an inquiry to a golf club about a visit or perhaps membership, we use e-mail because it is fast and easy. If we then wait several days for a reply, it tells us all we wish to know about that club. It is inefficient, behind the times and not very inviting. We expect a friendly and near instant reply. A golf club has many issues that need attention, but enquiries with any marketing implications must be right at the top of the 'important and urgent' list.

Of importance is the user-friendly nature of the e-mail address used to make bookings. Compiling a database of UK clubs soon revealed that many clubs live with a nightmare e-mail address; one that probably costs them at least some bookings each year. Remember: even one small typo in an e-mail address means transmission failure and you will never know you didn't receive it. At the other end will be a disgruntled potential customer who thinks you are ignoring him/her. It is far better to have an address like "playgolf@twgc.co.uk" than "[James-Hoddinut@the-wilson-star-golfclub.karoo.co.uk](mailto:James-Hoddinut@the-wilson-star-golfclub.karoo.co.uk)" Get real! At least half of your potential customers are going to get it wrong and it doesn't meet the criterion of being welcoming and friendly.

## **Section 6 - Promoting Your Club**

Public relations initiatives are vital to good marketing and should be exploited at every opportunity. This section is available to purchasers of the full package:

## **Section 7 - The Membership Dilemma**

7.1. If there is one topic about which Club Management Committees have agonised above all others, it is the membership issue. A few have successfully tackled the problem, but the majority have failed to grasp reality. There are too many memberships available at a time when, world wide, there is a real decline in the take-up of membership. In the UK, 100,000 fewer members over some 10 years with an attrition rate exceeding 4%

represents a major decline. The whole face of golf has changed dramatically over the last 30 years or so. TV publicity in particular has taken the sport from a pursuit for wealthy gentlemen, to a sport that is within the aspirations of a much wider section of society.

This has made the golf club an attractive proposition for businessmen looking for an investment. Combined with an hotel, a bowling green and an attractive club house, golf clubs are a good investment. Had the number of clubs and therefore the number of membership opportunities remained constant, the older traditional clubs would have been in clover. However, the fast growth of new clubs with their business ethics and more user-friendly approach to the sport has not only catered for new golfers, but has also offered opportunities to existing golfers to move to a club or playing profile that is more suited to their requirements. The reality is that membership subscriptions have continued to rise at a time when green fees have reduced. Realistically, if you are a weekend golfer who can play for £20 or less as an alternative to an £800 p.a. subscription, financially you are almost certainly better off not joining a club. Of course, club members know that there are additional benefits from being a club member, but if you have never been a member, they will not be apparent to you and you will not miss them. Moreover, in tighter financial circumstances, in some clubs those benefits are declining as the belt is tightened. As a consequence of the changes, most traditional clubs have suffered to some extent and those that have not will do so in the future. Get your marketing on track and your chances of improving recruiting will be greatly enhanced. Tinkering around the edges will not do the job. However, recognize that the future of golf clubs is certainly not in buoyant memberships. It lies in a healthy mix of members and visitors with an ever-greater reliance on the latter.

## 7.2. Membership Categories

Traditionally golf clubs have offered very few membership categories. Today the sensible management will offer a range of membership categories that focus on age ranges and ability to pay. Means testing is no form of option, but it is possible to make valid assumptions. Quite naturally, the juniors have very little disposable income and must rely on parents to pay their fees. A little further up the scale are those who have perhaps finished education and are in modestly paid employment. Progress a few years and we come to those with young families who are perhaps coping with their first mortgage and the costs of children entering education. A little further still we come to the age group where the children have left home, the mortgage has been mitigated by years of inflation and Mum has got herself back into employment after years of looking after the kids. From that point we move to those adjusting to living on a pension. There are other segments of personal development that must be considered, but the wise club will consider each category as a separate marketing challenge. One size does not fit all and the key to success is coming up with membership packages that best match the requirements and ability to pay of each category. How clubs tackle this will be dictated very much by local circumstances. Do your research and make certain that you get it right.

One frequent comment is: "If we do that our members will get upset if someone is paying less than them". The simple question they must answer is "Would you rather we lost those members and made up the lost revenue by increasing your fees"? e.g. "Would you rather see 100 Junior members paying £20 per month or would you prefer to make

up the shortfall in our income stream by each paying another £50 p.a.”? The question attracts just one response.

### 7.3. Joining Fees

In some 80% of clubs, the joining fee has gone. Originally a way of screwing extra money out of wealthy people, it is now a simple deterrent to membership. Golf is no longer a sport exclusively for the wealthy although taking up golf is already very expensive and probably the most expensive sport for the beginner to enter. Clubs must be aware of this financial barrier and where necessary, take steps to remove or at least mitigate it. If your club cannot offer manageable financial options, there will be someone nearby who can. Consider this:

- a. Example 1. You pay an annual subscription of £800 and a joining fee of a similar amount. A minimal provision of second-hand equipment costs £400 giving a minimum first year cost of £2000.
- b. Example 2. You pay the annual subscription of £800 by 12 equal monthly payments of £65, getting a discount of £20 annually for paying by direct debit. You don't pay a joining fee, but you do have to lay out not less than £400 for golf equipment. You are not going to find a bill for £800+ dropping on your doorstep in the middle of March next year.

If you can sustain option 1 because you have a waiting list and a queue waiting to join, continue with it. However, most clubs would be better served by option 2.

### 7.4. Keeping your Existing Members

I have already emphasised the prime marketing imperative of keeping customers happy. In the context of a golf club, this will mostly mean the members. Remember, every member who retains membership is as good as a new recruit, so internal recruiting matters. I have also said that some of the most valuable members in your club are the seniors. As they depart through age and infirmity they will be difficult to replace. In the age group 60 to 80 years, these members are a legacy of reasonably prosperous times and many have pensions based on the index-linking and generous final salary schemes that are becoming a part of history. Those members will be difficult to replace so hang on to them as long as you can. Enlightened clubs provide parking spaces for rent by members where they can keep their own buggy. The economics are very favourable with a space that costs c£120 to provide fetching £75 annually from rental. How a commercial business would love such rewarding opportunities.

### 7.5. Temporary Membership Initiatives

If your course has special characteristics that single it out from others in your area, always consider offering temporary memberships or bulk purchase green fee options. An obvious situation is where the course is generally playable when others are likely to be closed through wet weather. This is an exploitable USP. The offer of temporary

membership from say, December through to March, may well be attractive to players from other clubs that are not so fortunate. You know which other clubs are likely to suffer and, if you have got your marketing administration in order, you have the names and e-mail addresses of some of their members. A mail shot may do the trick and, who knows, some may stay as permanent members after their temporary membership ends in March.

If these players are not interested in temporary membership, they may be interested in buying your winter green fee card that entitles them to a set number of rounds for an agreed fee. The card is easy to produce and administer and should be for a set number of rounds to be used by a certain date. Ideally the number of rounds should not be divisible by four, making the purchase of a further card a probability if an odd number of rounds remain.

## **Section 8 - Making the Most of On-Course Assets**

### 8.1. Property.

#### 8.1.1. On Course Buildings.

a. Many courses have valuable assets that are not exploited. The most common is the cottage or bungalow that was once occupied by greens staff or the club secretary. Dependent upon the area, these are often let at modest rental. However a bungalow that is let for say £400 per month or £4,800 p.a. can gross a great deal more if put to proper use. Given the benefit of two bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen and sitting room, they can easily be made available for small societies from 4 persons upwards. Even charging a party of four just £100 per day for accommodation and golf (£700 per week), just 40% occupancy delivers £14,000 p.a. Realistically, with good marketing, each unit will deliver far in excess of that figure and two units could match the income from 40 or 50 members that you could not recruit. Sadly, many club committees lack business acumen and such opportunities are never spotted or there is not the expertise or drive to develop the concept.

b. Some courses, particularly those that were originally developed from complete farms, still have valuable barns and other structures that offer opportunities for conversions to dwelling houses. Often these buildings are simply used as storage for club machinery or supplies without the commercial potential being recognised. If you have such a building, get a planning consultant to take a look at it with a view to at least identifying it's potential.

#### 8.1.2. Club Restaurant.

The Club Restaurant is often of a really good standard, with staff that are quite capable of maintaining a high quality food service. A lot of the time they are simply producing fast food or snacks, but on certain evenings of the week they move into another gear to service club functions. Anyone who has been in the restaurant business will testify to the problems of running a successful venture. One of the problems is that there is generally not a secure client base that guarantees that the bills can be met. A golf club restaurant is

a different sort of venture. There is a potential client base of 600 or 700 members who may not all make use of the facility, but if it does not operate profitably they all contribute to make up the deficit through the fees they pay. The facility therefore has a fairly solid base and most have scope for business development by competing for outside business. If you have the capacity and are in an area where you can meet the competition on quality and price, why not consider increasing your revenue by taking bookings from the public?

### 8.1.3. Half-Way House.

(This item could quite well be in the section on Practical Marketing, but being applicable only to some clubs, may be better dealt with here.)

#### a. Asset or Liability

An open half-way house is a real marketing asset; a closed facility is a real marketing minus as players pass by wondering why it's not open. Those who have played in North America will be aware that there are only a hand full of clubs that do not have a mid-round facility and a mobile service. Certainly circumstances are different in the UK, but running the facility on Saturday and Sunday should certainly be possible.

Some of the more prestigious clubs do operate their facility very successfully. Raising these examples is often met by the retort: "well that's a posh club" or similar. It may be true, but the fact is that any golf course has a finite number of players on the course at any one time and all look for the same sort of service: viz. a cup of tea, coffee or soup and perhaps some fast food. Posh or not, the demand is pretty much the same.

#### b. Recognising the Problems.

Many clubs have a problem where the catering is franchised and the franchisee is concerned that the half-way house will be taking away trade. Similarly, in-house catering can fear being affected by the same problem. The first dilemma is therefore whether the marketing benefit of providing an on-course service outweighs the possible loss to the main catering facility. The experience in North America is that it does. The second problem is that it may not be financially viable to allocate a member of staff to the facility; wages exceeding income. Similarly, it may not be possible to find someone willing to staff the facility. There is a solution that some clubs may find acceptable.

#### c. Solving the Staff/Financial Viability Problem.

Some clubs will already have solved the problem or will be able to do so from existing resources. If you haven't, consider this. In a lay-by near you there is a well-used mobile catering facility. It may be a caravan or a temporary building. It will be staffed by an expert in providing fast food at prices the lorry driver is prepared to pay. The operator will be fast, efficient, inexpensive and probably very personable (If he's not he would have ceased trading). Question: When does he do his main business? Answer: During the working week! At weekends he is closed (the lorry drivers have knocked off and are playing golf!) He would probably love to staff your facility as a franchisee. You can probably charge him a

fee, but you won't be making a fortune from the catering. However, he will provide just the type of service you require and in marketing terms you will have upped your game quite markedly. Not a solution for everyone, but for some it may be the answer.

#### 8.1.4. Par 3 Practice Courses

Some clubs do have a short course or loop that is generally used for nothing more than practice. Can you use that course or convert it for use as a starter facility, charging a small annual fee for membership restricted to use of that course only?

### Conclusion

The above document offers some practical considerations for those who wish to improve the marketing and associated management performance of their Golf Club. Not all of the topics covered will apply to all clubs and there will be many topics that are not covered that will apply to others. However, if you examine the marketing effort of your club against the performance targets mentioned, you will certainly come out of the exercise stronger than when you went in. If you find there are areas where you can improve, do not be afraid to take action. Clubs that do take action will be the exception and will stand out from their 'sticking plaster' competitors who simply try to solve problems as they arise. It is worth repeating that it is in the nature of committees to simply discuss matters and just tidy up around the fringes! Most will do just that. We are all friends in matters of golf, but do not be embarrassed at raising your performance against the interests of your neighbours, competition is good for business development. Don't sit on your hands, be the successful exception.