

COLLABORATE

Proponent Group

The Premier Network of Golf Instructors

PROONENT GROUP NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2016

OUTSTANDING SHOW LINE-UP COVERS TRENDING TOPICS

This month's PGA Show presentations, spread over Wednesday and Thursday, promise to keep Proponent members ahead of the curve as we continue to provide opportunities for you to grow your business and grow your teaching skills in 2016.

Some of the key themes will include not one, but two presentations on the latest in performance analysis, with industry leaders **Peter Sanders** of ShotByShot.com and **Dr. Mark Broadie** of Columbia University. Each will be updating you on where data collection and analysis are heading in the burgeoning statistical side of the sport.

Additional highlights will include:

John Weir, Director of Mental Golf Academy and Peak Performance Coach, presenting his research on

How to Teach to Your Student's Personality to Speed Improvement

Top 100 Teacher **Glenn Deck** makes his first presentation to our members with his study called *Genetic Golf: A Shift in How We Teach*.

Another first time speaker, **Justin Poynter**, GM at the Jim McLean Golf Center in Fort Worth, TX will be drilling down into *The Business of Coaching and Managing People*.

As always, there is no cost for Proponent members to attend and our members receive PGA and/or LPGA education credits for each session they come to. All sessions will be held in **Room W109B**. The complete line-up for both days can be found on page 2 of this newsletter.



PGA

2016 MERCHANDISE SHOW

WELCOME TO OUR REDESIGNED MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

After eight years of our original look, this month we are pleased to debut our redesigned Proponent newsletter. The goal was simple: To make every page as reader-friendly as possible. We brought in **Tim Carr**, former Art Director of *GOLF Magazine* and *Golf World* and Tim delivered the fresh look we wanted—by introducing cleaner fonts, bolder headlines, a lighter page density and a more attractive color palette.

We hope you find the new design easier to use as we continually work to make your member benefits as valuable as possible.

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PROPONENT'S PGA SHOW LINE-UP

NOTE: All sessions will be in Room W109B.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27 LINE-UP:

- **8am** - **Peter Sanders** of ShotByShot.com taking on the topic of *Game Analysis: How Far Has It Come?*
- **9am** - K-Vest's **Tony Morgan** and **Ryan Lumsden** on *Identifying Correlations to Define Coaching Priorities for Your Students*
- **10am** - Golf Channel's **Carolina Casteneda** discussing *Social Media 2016: The Latest Tricks of the Trade*
- **11am** - **Jon Sinclair** of Sinclair's Golf Training Center in Eules, TX on *Discovering the Differences Between 2D Video and 3D Motion Capture*
- **1pm** - **John Weir**, Director of Mental Golf Academy and Peak Performance Coach, presenting his research on how to *Teach to Your Student's Personality Profile to Speed Improvement*
- **2pm** - **Glenn Deck**, Golf Magazine Top 100 Teacher based at Pelican Hill and Oak Creek G.C. in Newport Beach, CA, shares his study of *Genetic Golf: A Shift in How We Teach*
- **3-4:30pm** - **** Associate Members Meeting **** hosted by **Lorin Anderson**, covering topics for our younger members who are building their careers



Jon Sinclair

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28 LINE-UP:

- **9am** - Columbia University's **Dr. Mark Broadie**, author of the book "Every Shots Counts," presents *Data and Analytics to Improve Performance and Strategy*
- **10am** - **Justin Poynter**, Director of Instruction and General Manager at the Jim McLean Golf Center in Fort Worth, TX on *The Business of Coaching and Managing People*
- **11am** - **Dr. Robert Neal**, creator of Golf BioDynamics and consultant to many Tour players, national teams and junior academies explains the *Forces and Torques Applied to the Handle of the Golf Club*
- **1pm** - **David Orr**, Director of Instruction, Campbell University PGA Golf Management program and putting coach to a roster of touring professionals including 2013 U.S. Open champion Justin Rose, presents *Putting: Coaching the Tour Player*
- **2pm** - **Dr. Mike Duffey** and **Eric Handley** return again this year from Penn State University to explain the finer points of *Assessing and Teaching with Ground Forces*
- **3pm** - **Harry Van der Lei**, Mental Performance Expert at Hourglass Performance Institute in Tallahassee, FL rounds out the sessions with *Do We Trust What We Do In Golf?*



Dr. Robert Neal

NEW MEMBERSHIP FEES TO REWARD UPFRONT AND ON-TIME RENEWALS

Proponent Group takes pride in the fact that we've never had to raise our full-member annual fee since we began providing services more than eight years ago. We've done that through careful cost-management. However, one area has continued to take up more finances and manpower — the task of payment processing and tracking down expired and declined credit cards for renewals.

After much consideration, we have decided to **keep the 2016 membership rates the same as last year for all membership classes**, as long as payment is made at the beginning of your annual cycle. For those choosing to pay in bi-annual or monthly installments, fees will be increased to reflect our costs

Also beginning in 2016, any member renewal that is more than 45 days overdue will have a **\$25 service fee** added to the renewal.

Examples of the new **Full** and **Associate** Member rates for 2016 are:

Full (one payment)	\$595
Full (two payments)	\$630
Full (monthly)	\$660
Associate (one payment)	\$345
Associate (two payments)	\$370
Associate (monthly)	\$390

The full rate card will be included in your next renewal notice.



EXCLUSIVELY FROM BOBBY JONES, JUST FOR PROPONENT MEMBERS

All current product from Bobby Jones' outstanding mens' and womens' lines is available for personal use to Proponent Members at outstanding preferred pricing:

WITHOUT BOBBY JONES LOGO: 30% off standard wholesale pricing
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*Check out all the options at bobbyjones.com. To place a personal use order – or for pricing on bulk orders for outings, golf schools or other student usage – contact **Susan Moshier** in Customer Service at **404-836-0573** or at smoshier@jonesglobalsports.com.*

WHEN IN DOUBT, TURN TO THE PROPONENT WEBSITE

Take this guided tour of our members-only website, chock full of knowledge that will continue to keep you one step ahead.

by David Gould Staff Editor

When a teacher's jumbo-sized ball basket emerges from the dispenser you can tell at a glance it's loaded and ready for serious use. That's not the case with a "content" website, which looks the same from the outside whether it's well-stocked or not.

But after nearly a decade of research, reporting, videotaping, photo-gathering, talent-recruiting and archiving, Proponent Group's website is stacked deep and wide with exclusive content on a myriad of topics. The challenge, it seems, is to know what's in there and how best to leverage it, either to hone your craft or build your business.

Last year usage of the site by members hit an all-time high. There were over 19,000 "sessions" of site use, which translates to 50-plus sessions a day, 365 days a year. These visits accounted for 86,965 page views. Some of this activity occurred on the public-facing version of the site, which is relatively minimal and serves the visitor who wants basic information about Proponent.

Still, about three-quarters of all visits were by active members, who are even starting to hop on the site from their handheld devices. Last year, 30 percent of visits were via smartphone or tablet and that number is rising. About 15 percent of visits came from outside the U.S., about what one would expect given the membership's geographical distribution.

Upon entering the site, where did authorized users go? Not surprisingly, the **Job Board** was a clear No. 1, recording 6,711 views. Many of the job postings listed on the Proponent site are either exclusive to our platform or posted to our board before they appear on any other job listings, such as PGA Links or the LPGA website. "Given the quality of our network of instructors," explains Lorin Anderson, Proponent Group president, "employers often try to fill the position first by tapping into our membership—they know they'll get excellent candidates."

In keeping with the bedrock concept that networking and collaboration are top-priority with

<p>Videos / Webinars</p>  <p>Browse more than 100 hours of business and teaching presentations arranged by category on your desktop, tablet or smartphone.</p> <p>Click Here →</p>	<p>Job Board</p>  <p>An exclusive, detailed list of teaching and coaching positions for top clubs, resorts and golf academies worldwide.</p> <p>Click Here →</p>	<p>Member Mentors</p>  <p>A list of experienced members who have offered to assist other members in more than 40 areas of business and teaching expertise.</p> <p>Click Here →</p>				
<p>Business Guides</p>  <p>Our Business Guides are written specifically for our membership of top tier instructors covering a variety of business issues.</p> <p>Click Here →</p>	<p>Member Discounts</p>  <p>Proponent Group has arranged for a variety of exclusive member discounts for business services, technology and apparel.</p> <p>Click Here →</p>	<p>Business Templates</p>  <p>Our templates provide the most instructor-specific information ever created for a wide variety of business situations you face.</p> <p>Click Here →</p>				
 <p>Proponent Preferred</p>	 <p>Surveys</p>	 <p>The Job Search</p>	 <p>Certification Guide</p>	 <p>The Library</p>	 <p>Member Directory</p>	 <p>Newsletter Archive</p>

After logging on, hundreds of unique business tools are at your fingertips 24/7.

members, analytics shows the **Search Members** button to be second-most clicked: in 2015 there were 1,370 such searches. Next in frequency was the **Newsletter Archive**, where all articles in this very issue will soon be cached—it saw 1,266 visits. **Business Guides** (1,050 opens) and **Business Templates** (1,001 opens) completed the top-five ranking of site pages. In 2015 we took the newsletters apart, so to speak, re-archiving all articles by topic area (rather than requiring members to go issue-by-issue in search of a particular feature or report) to

make it much easier to find a previously published topic.

Rounding out the top 10 most-accessed pages were, in order:

- **Member Discounts** – a group of exclusive savings opportunities just for Proponent members. Using just one or two each year can recoup your entire annual membership fee.
- **The Library** – a place where you can find highly rated books on a variety of teaching and business topics as chosen by our members.
- **Proponent Preferred** – a listing of nearly two dozen highly-qualified and vetted professionals who can provide services to our members in everything from book publishing to insurance issues to app development.
- **Member Mentors** – our list of members who have expertise in a specific subject and are willing to share it with other members covers more than 50 subjects on which you may need assistance.
- **Resume Template** – Our resume template guides you through the process of creating your resume and was created in association with head professionals and academy owners who told us what they wanted to see in applicant resumes. Also in the The Job Search section of the site are guides to writing cover letters and preparing for interviews.

The entire structure of Proponent Group—and the website reflects this—is geared toward providing a multiplicity of tools, tactics and services. Instead of one-offs, there are usually layers of support tools available. In one sense the site's content creates

My Profile

Member Home

My Profile

Change Password

Payment Update

The My Profile menu on the members' website allows you to update your personal profile information, change your password or update your credit card information at any time.

pathways to go down, so that step by step there's guidance for the myriad challenges.

Consider the member who is looking to make a move from his or her current facility and perhaps find greener pastures. A logical first stop within the website would be Member Mentors, which itself is sub-divided into categories like **Making a Proposal to a Facility, Independent Contractor vs. Employee Issues, Contract Negotiations** and **Growing a Teaching Brand**. For each of these challenges, a group of seasoned and successful members are willing and able to provide information and guidance. Likely any of them would direct this move-ready member right back to the website, to pore over the **2015 Operations and Compensation Survey Results** (located under Member Surveys). That would provide a view-from-30,000-feet of what's possible out there, as a compensation level to aspire to.

INSTRUCTION GREATNESS, AVAILABLE ON VIDEO FOR MEMBERS

We live in the age of video communications, so it's no surprise how often the **Videos/Webinars** button under Member Benefits gets clicked. In 2015, there 8,798 viewings of video files on the Proponent site. Among the 10 most popular presentations, each was viewed at least 117 times—the top-ranked video, Martin Hall's "How I Teach the Short Game," was watched 647 times. Just below that in frequency was Cameron McCormick's "The Journey to High Performance," with 560 views.

For Trillium Sellers, the great Proponent double-down is to attend a live presentation during PGA Show Week, or at the annual Summit, then watch the tape of it later. "That combination of a face-to-face experience, plus the chance to see and hear it again on screen, has been great for me," she says. For Missie Berteotti, who is still splitting her days between teaching and child-rearing, the time for serious business-building lies in the future. But honing her craft and getting even better results for students has her returning time and again to the likes of Hall, McCormick and the rest. "I'm focused now on continuing to learn from all our great members," Berteotti says enthusiastically. The vault of video content gets new content added constantly, so best not to go too long without dipping into it.

Best of all, Proponent records all presentations at its events throughout the year and posts them for all members to watch at their convenience. And it's all included in the annual membership fee even if you can't attend in person. — **D.G.**

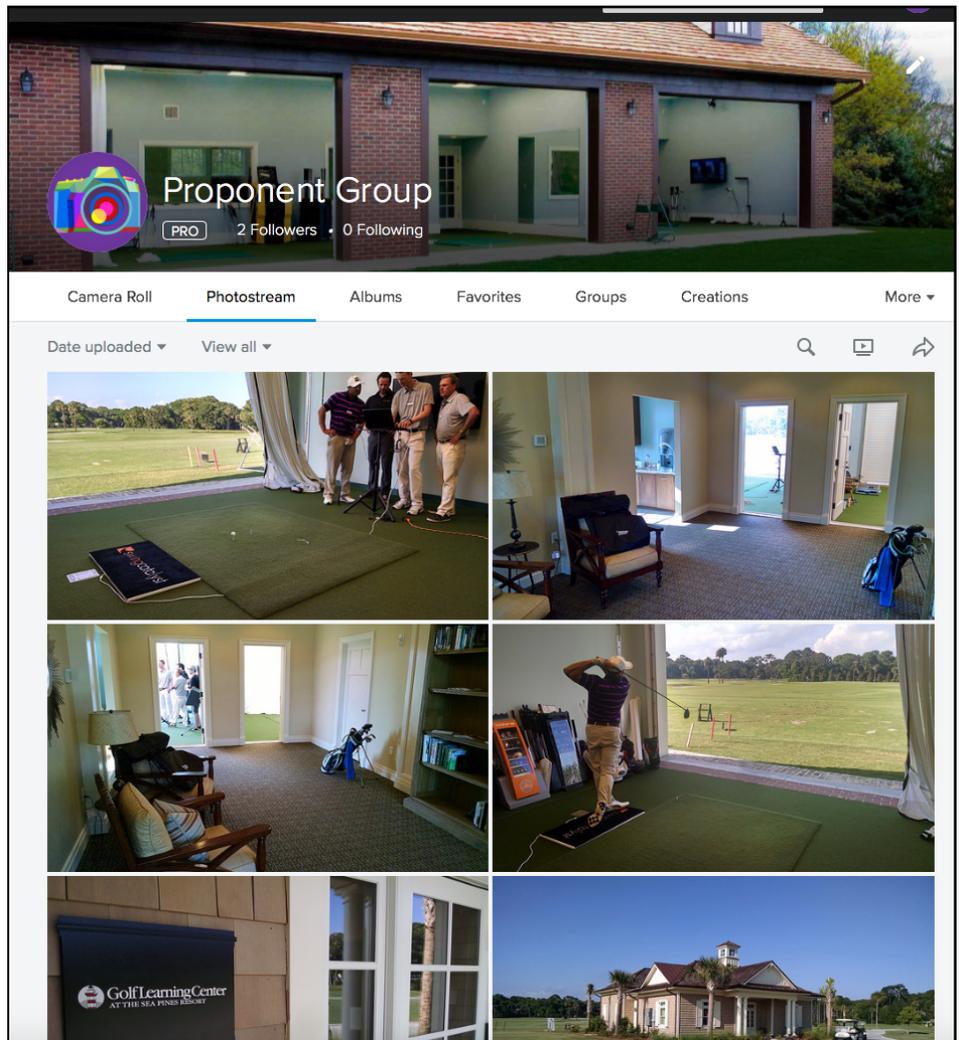


Martin Hall at a Proponent Summit.

All that would lead up to a session with the **Instructor Business Proposal Template**, a blueprint for persuading facilities to set up a mutually profitable partnership between academy and course ownership. Along the way this hypothetical instructor would also do well to review the **Golf Instructor's Guide to Becoming an Independent Contractor**.

When it comes to new construction of learning-center buildings—surely the keystone capital investment in the teaching-coaching field—the Proponent site may be more substantive and comprehensive than all other sources on this subject combined. The **teaching building photo gallery** is enormous, the archived how-to info from expert Tim Cutshall is must-read stuff, the **G2 Case Study** is fascinating and the **Mike Bender New Facility Profile** gets down to the absolute nitty-gritty details of these projects. To further light the way we provide the **Teaching Building Survey and Guide**—which includes costs, specifications and even some what-we'd-do-differently commentary from coaches who already have built their on-range indoor teaching facility.

David LaPour, director of instruction at Colleton River Plantation near Hilton Head, is set for groundbreaking and construction of an academy building in the coming months. In an unusual (but logical) break from standard practice, LaPour initiated the idea, oversaw all planning and even personally spearheaded a funding campaign for it within his prestigious 36-hole golf community. LaPour's reliance on Proponent assets was multi-layered. "During the course of the project," he says, "I made use of the Teaching Building Survey and Guide, the Photo Gallery of existing buildings, plus advice from Kenny Nairn." Indeed, you'll find Orlando-based Nairn on the Member Mentors page under Designing/Constructing a Teaching Building. "I also got support directly from Lorin," adds LaPour. The website's list of Member Benefits doesn't exactly include the one-on-one



Proponent's photo gallery of teaching buildings is one of the largest ever assembled.

consulting availability of Proponent's president—it's just a given.

Some assets on the site are meant for use at certain points on the calendar. That's especially true for the **Annual Report Template**, the **Monthly Golf Chairman Instructor Report** and perhaps **The Business Value of Golf Instruction Report**. The latter can be put to use as one year is ending and the next season is being planned. Trillium Sellers, director of instruction at Woodmont Country Club outside Washington, D.C., has been putting more energy of late into documentation of her contribution to the club's financial health. For that she turns to the **Instructor Economic Impact Calculator** and its companion document, **Economic Impact Study Results**.

“During the course of the project, I made use of the Teaching Building Survey and Guide, the Photo Gallery of existing buildings, plus advice from Member Mentors.”

— DAVID LAPOUR

“The templates and guides on Proponent’s website have been immensely helpful to me in reflecting the value I create through my teaching and programs,” says Sellers. “Any teaching professional would want to document their value and communicate it, but it’s difficult to know where to start. What we get from Proponent Group is the outline of an objective, professional presentation. It’s a synthesis of what’s out there in the industry, and from that you can pick and choose to customize your own document.”

*(Note: Speaking of content geared toward specific times of year, we suggest you spend a half hour, fairly soon, with the **Golf Instructor’s Tax Return Guide.**)*

Tools like the **Guide to Pricing Services** and the **Guide to Negotiating a Raise** are also uniquely valuable, Sellers feels. “The alternative is calling fellow professionals on the phone more or less randomly,” she says. “This is on a completely different level and it’s enormously useful.”

When Jason Birnbaum spends time on the website, he’ll often start by watching recorded videos from seminars and events he’s missed. “I find it very educational to see presentations by coaches I’m interested in learning from,” says Birnbaum, who is director of instruction at the New Jersey Golf Academy. “Also, I’m always looking to improve my resume, and have used the resume tools on the site, including the samples,” he adds. “The coaching certification opportunities, things like the Henry Brunton/Rick Jenson events, are also very helpful. It’s great to have access to them.”



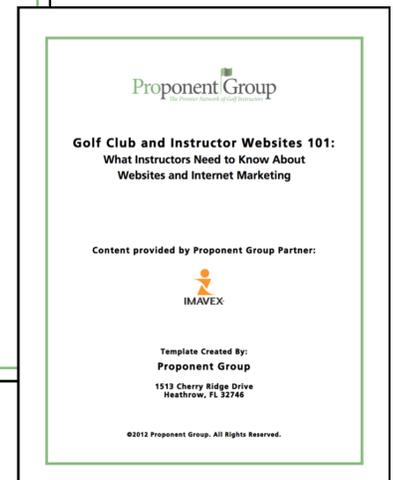
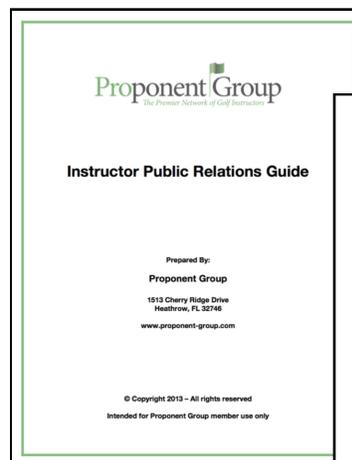
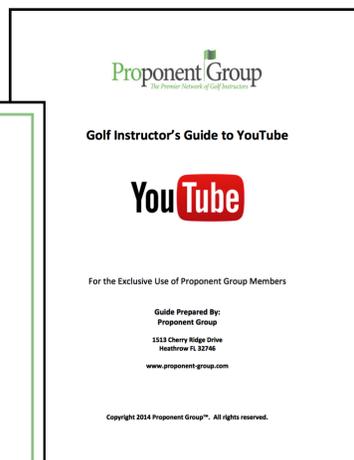
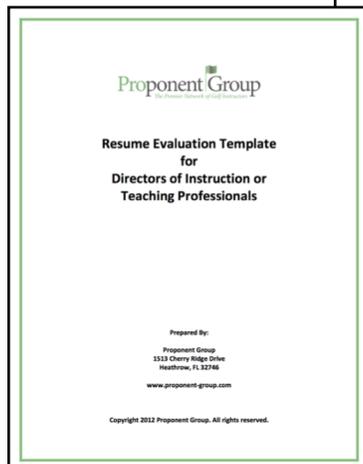
Check the **Exclusive Discounts** menu for a variety of cost saving opportunities from Bobby Jones, Hertz, TrackMan and others.

Every effort has been made to categorize content on the site so that help is easily found. What a member must also find—better to say, make—is time to work with what’s in there. Bill Abrams, a member who teaches seasonally in Chicago and Florida, views the Proponent website as one big message to teaching professionals that says: Step back and re-examine your business frequently, toward the goal, in Abrams’ words, of “working fewer hours but being more

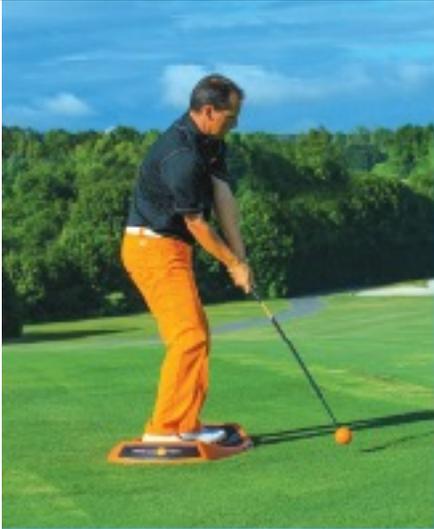
productive.” When he sees a rainy day or some other break coming up, he schedules time to “just sit down and do it,” finding that over time this effort “becomes part of the fabric” of his working life.

Abrams is now at a point where meetings with his business attorney usual involve a Proponent Group form he has filled out or an article he’s read, to guide the discussion along. Perhaps his favorite tools in the toolbox are those Economic Impact documents. “I’ve come back to the Economic Impact Calculator time and again,” says Bill. “It lets a teacher show what he or she brings to the table. At times I’ve submitted those numbers and people have really been blinded by them.” Blinded by the light, in other words. A statement like that one is welcome payoff for every hour and dollar spent researching, writing and reporting to create the website.

Translation: That teaching basket of range balls will keep coming out of the hopper, and members will keep spilling them out each morning, but your exclusive Proponent Group members’ website is also filled to the brim—with what you’ll need to get a far greater return on your daily investment of time and effort. **PG**



More than two dozen Business Guides and Business Templates are available only for Proponent Group members on the website.



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VARY YOUR MESSAGE TO FIT FOUR DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

Experts who study the mindsets of various age brackets find clear differences in their values and motivations. Golf instruction should take heed.

By Ian James, RetailTribe CEO

On days when your 10-and-under junior golfers are a handful, just think about Anna Liotta's overstressed parents. Liotta, a marketing consultant who wrote "Unlocking Generational Codes," grew up as one of 19 children, in a household that spanned six generations. She got quite a head start in her study of generational marketing. Today her consulting work with major corporations stresses the idea that people born in different eras really do view the world differently—and express themselves distinctly from one another.

Reading Liotta's new book would be a wise move for any Proponent Group member. It's designed to help you prepare and frame your marketing messages—even at times your programming—so that it truly strikes a chord and gets results with the 70-year-old you're targeting, or the 50-year-old or 30-year-old, and so forth.

Using the ideas and tools provided by Liotta, I recently did some work on behalf of Proponent Group member Steve Whidden, whose Whidden Golf Academy serves greater Tampa Bay. At his previous club, Steve encountered some pretty tough business challenges with a predominantly older membership. "They're not interested in improving," was Whidden's summation of that group. "They've got their handicaps, and all they want to do is play in their same group at the same time each week."

A RetailTribe online survey supported Steve's assessment. Of golfers born before 1950, less than 1 percent said they were likely to schedule a lesson in the coming 12 months. That's about as dead-set-against-it as a market segment will ever be. But as I looked at Anna Liotta's description of these old-guard types, their anti-instruction bias seemed

psychographically on-point. Americans born between 1927 and 1945 are known in Liotta's book as "Traditionals." They're also referred to at times as the "Silent Generation." The prime influences on this generation? Certainly, the Great Depression and the Second World War, for starters. Theirs has been a generation of service and duty, which is reflected in their values and motivating forces. For the Traditionals, life is about loyalty, commitment and hard work, with not much expectation of enjoyment.

The golf club membership model was made for this generation. They aspired to join a club they would remain loyal to for life. And, as Steve Whidden found out, many of them are also faithful to their set routine as golfers, continuing to play week after week, despite the fact that their games are bad and getting worse. They don't seem to have the motivation to press for change, even as their four hours on-course continues to produce misery. At least they're honoring their commitment to their group.

From a marketing perspective we need to acknowledge that Traditionals are diminishing in numbers. It's a harsh challenge to try and sell coaching programs to them, to the point that one would be tempted to ignore them and skip on. I would question that, however. While it's true that the effort-to-profit ratio may look unattractive, at many clubs this group still has its hands on the reins of management. That means you need to make some effort, if not to drag them into coaching, then to at least get their influence on the side of your business and coaching initiatives.



The golf industry hasn't worried much about imminent loss of the Traditionalists (through advancing age) because the **Baby Boomers** (those born between 1946 and '64) have been poised to swell memberships and tee sheets. Our demographic expectation was that the fairways would be filled with Boomers, as this large and relatively wealthy group reached retirement.

The trouble is, they haven't retired. Not in the expected numbers, anyway. This generation seems determined to continue to work, be it part-time or even full-time. Thus they don't have liberty to play golf three times a week and on weekends. Even if they did, decisions about how to spend free time changed as their careers moved along.

The husband's golf-first mentality has been traded in for decision-making patterns that honor the wishes of his wife. It's a factor club managers have been aware of. If they want their Boomer males to renew memberships, spend more time at the club and play a lot of golf, managers should be encouraging their golf instructors to urge wives to get and/or stay involved. That means truly guiding them up the pathway to better golf so they can enjoy the time they devote to it. And yes, 'enjoyment' is a factor. This generation wants their leisure time to be pleasurable.

Boomers also expect to be forever young. Sixty is the new 40 for them. These golfers don't accept a loss of yards as part of the aging process. Instead they want all possible help in retaining their youth and vigor. In a spot survey at one golf club, it was found that almost every golfer between 45 and 55 believed it was *possible that they could currently play the best golf of their lives!*

One other note about Boomers involves geographical mobility. Many migrated with their jobs during long, successful careers. That has put some pressure on the membership model. Why pay a joining fee when you're not sure where you're going to settle down? Previously, job

mobility prompted the question of future location. Now it's: "Where are the grandchildren going to live?"

Speaking of the grandchildren, let's look at how you should design messages for the younger generations.

Gen-X: Reluctant to Trust, Quick to Measure

The pressure Baby Boomers have exerted on the model is nothing compared to the impact of **Gen-X**. This is a generation that expects, not desires, to get a 'return' on any investment—be it money, time or commitment. And, by the way, they pay for everything monthly.

The women and the men are alike in their patterns. Females are captains of industry, juggling job, family, household and friends, and they expect their partner to play a full role in that relationship. All of that adds to the time pressure.

When Gen-X women and men do decide to think about coaching, you can figure they will review websites, search for testimony, and know clearly the result they're after. This group understands there's a process (the lesson or clinic) but they want to trust that they're *going to get the result*. They are very calculating.

There is, though, a place where this generation loses its head—with their children. Whatever it takes, they want their child to have it. The best education. The safest environment. The happiest childhood. If there's a team, they want to know how to get their kid involved.

The success of PGA Junior League golf shows us what's possible with this group and their children. And by the way, the parents come to practice. That's a double-up opportunity. Practice for the children, introduction to golf for the parents.

Millennials: Don't Give Up—Connect!

The **Millennials**, born somewhere between 1982 and 2004. This is now the largest segment of the U.S.

Generations and Golf: Summary

<p>Traditionalists Born 1927 - 1945</p>	<p>Often the management and leadership of golf facilities. One-on-one coaching and / or individual practice will not be a high priority. Want coaching that supports their social groups. Eg Breakfast Groups out on the course.</p>
<p>Baby Boomers Born 1946 - 1964</p>	<p>Not retiring. Forever young, wanting to stay alert and healthy. Want 60 to be the new 40, and their performance to reflect that. Want anything that helps them stay supple, strong, and able to hit the ball far and high. Increasing need to have partners participate and play to a competent level.</p>
<p>Gen-X Born 1965 - 1979</p>	<p>Return on Investment (of time, money and commitment) with very large priority on children and their development. Children and Youth group coaching, PGA Junior League, elite coaching for juniors. Family events appeal. Both genders make these potential 'power couples' with strong affinity to results-based programs.</p>
<p>Millennials Born 1980 - 1999</p>	<p>The connected generation. Digital natives. No technology, no solution. Love options and variety, especially if it involves launch monitors, simulators, video. Very happy in inclusive groups. Enjoyment and encouragement is more important than actual result. Want to be connected to their coach 24/7.</p>

workforce, so don't dismiss them as children. This is the "connected generation," the true "digital natives"—they think a landline is a boundary drawn on a map.

When you set about serving this particular tribe, do it with the mantra of "no technology = no solution." Translation: Whether or not you can do the job without technology, they don't believe you can. Also, if you're going to be their golf coach, they'll expect you to "connect" with them. They want to be in your WhatsApp group. Even if it's 10 o'clock at night, they want you to be available to receive a video they've taken and offer your encouragement in response. If they go on your social network, they'll be looking for their own names, up there in lights.

Booking by telephone? No chance. They want to plug into your calendar and make their own booking, pay immediately, and after the lesson access the video and your notes, share lesson photos with friends, even invite friends along to the next session.

They aren't looking for 50 minutes on the practice tee every session. They want a different approach week to week. Don't waste their time with the dusty customs known as "rules." Four-hole, five-person scrambles,

accompanied by the coach giving advice? They're in. Nine holes on a simulator with friends as the coach offers pointers between shots? They're in. This is a group you can have a lot of fun with.

Different 'Hangouts' for Different Generations

The point is that each of these groups is different. They have diverse expectations and motivations and they will present you with diverse challenges and opportunities. Each generation expects you to reach them in their hang-out of choice. It's not face-to-face, or email, or Facebook, or Twitter, or Instagram, or WhatsApp, or SnapChat. It's all of them.

Golf is a great game, with lots of opportunity for all ages, because it's a game that can be played by every generation together. But that means that as marketers and instructors we need to be very good at communicating with each and every generation. Just as with the golf swing, there's no one-size-fits-all.

The best news for you is that everyone's listening and wants to hear from you. **PG**

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THE GOLDEN AGE OF GOLF INSTRUCTION



When I started playing golf 40 years ago, golf instruction really didn't have much traction as a livelihood. There really weren't any Directors of Instruction and hardly anyone made a living just from teaching. Information about the golf swing was coming in at a slow drip and besides a few articles in the monthly golf magazines there wasn't a lot of

swing advice to pour over. Up until about the past 15-20 years, the situation was pretty stagnant with maybe a book or cover story being published each year that got golfers talking about a new swing concept. But beyond that, it was pretty quiet.

My, how things have changed, thanks to a confluence of factors including the rise of free and ever present instruction video on the internet and Golf Channel, the building of thousands of new courses in the 90s that all wanted more golfer amenities, the development of extraordinary data collection tools such as K-Vest, TrackMan and Swing Catalyst, the rise of the competitive player's entourage of fitness, mental and nutritional specialists and, finally, the advent of the modern teaching summit and you have what is today a fire hose of information and opportunity that simply did not exist at the turn of this century.

As we head into the New Year, I

couldn't be more excited about the unprecedented point that the golf instruction industry has now reached. I'm as sure as I have been about anything in this business, that we will look back on the past few years and note that this was the time when The Golden Age of Golf Instruction truly began.

The democratization and free-flow of information is always at the front end of any paradigm shift or significant growth opportunity for an industry. What we've seen happen in recent years to open the flood gates of information pertaining to how people play the game and how they can play it better is unprecedented and likely will never take such a big leap in such a short time ever again.

I hope that our members will continue to be the cream that rises to the top as you've shown very clearly that you are all learners who take your positions in the industry very seriously. It won't be

easy to keep up as you'll be constantly challenged to sort through the inevitable mis-information that flows out along with all the valuable data and discoveries. But think of the alternative: A stale, uninteresting teaching environment with minimal opportunity for growth that doesn't get you or your students nearly as excited to improve.

Simply put, this is an extraordinary time to be a golf instructor. I hope you embrace this opportunity because no other portion of the game is in as much flux and has as much potential to invigorate the game going forward as does high quality golf instruction. **PG**

“What we've seen happen in recent years to open the floodgates of information...likely will not take such a major leap in such a short period ever again.”

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ROB NOEL

ROB NOEL GOLF ACADEMY, COVINGTON, LA

INTERVIEW BY DAVID GOULD

Rob Noel's story is one of small-town roots and a big-time interest in how the golf swing works. Full of curiosity from a young age, Noel pursued playing and then teaching with the type of hard work that creates good luck. Along his path of professional development, the Proponent Group member crossed paths with a succession of valuable mentors and peers who inspired him toward coaching excellence. It was all this Louisiana Cajun lad would need to build his technical knowledge and communication skills to a lofty level.

The footprint of the Rob Noel Golf Academy in his region is significant. It's part of the Golf Channel Academy network and by acclamation it's the leading golf instruction brand on the Gulf Coast. About a year ago, Noel's group added a third location, this time within the Carter Plantation golf community in Springfield, La., between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

A GOLF Magazine Top 100 Teacher, Noel does most of his one-on-one work at his original namesake academy. For 16 years it's been located at Money Hill Golf and Country Club, which is north of Lake Pontchartrain outside Covington, La. The company's other venue for teaching is the Big Easy Sportsplex, just west of New Orleans proper.

A husband and father of three, Rob does his best to balance work and personal life, breaking from the routine for family beach vacations on the Gulf and

hunting excursions with his son, Chase. One recent Sunday he spent part of his day off on the front porch, answering questions about what's he learned and how he's learned it, over a long and distinguished career that has plenty more to come.



Rob, you're from a fairly rural part of the Mississippi Delta. What was your childhood like?

I was born in Abbeville, Louisiana, a small Cajun town that's about 90 minutes from Baton Rouge and not far from Lafayette. My ancestors came here from the Canadian maritimes. You get the word "Cajun" from "Acadian," which was the early name for a person from Nova Scotia. They migrated this way in the 1700s and became rice farmers and fishermen. Some of them raised cattle, too. My dad and my uncles were Cajun speakers—they also spoke English—and I saw from an early age how much appreciation they had for hunting, fishing, being outdoors and eating raw crawfish, things like that. They told their raunchy jokes in English but the punchlines were always in French, so we kids could never get the meaning.



Rob Noel has built an award-winning reputation on the Gulf Coast with multiple academy locations around New Orleans.



Noel and his father took up the game together when Rob was nine years old.

What I remember is one day back when I was nine years old, at a point when my parents were talking about giving up their membership. I was friends with a kid named Lance Broussard and out of the blue he suggested we not go to the pool that day and try golf instead. If I remember right he had a junior-size bag with a half-dozen clubs in it, which we shared. I don't recall many details of that day, except that it gave me the bug to play more golf. I went home and told my father. The next day he went out and bought two sets of golf clubs, one for him and one for me, and just like that we were a pair of beginning golfers.

As far as we know there weren't any Get Golf Ready programs at that time.

No, but of all things my dad had two employees flying his charter planes who were scratch golfers, the Sonnier brothers, Randy and Doug. Doug had played for LSU and Randy was a super-talented player who would end up losing to Scott Verplank in the semi-finals of the 1984 U.S. Amateur, having lost 1-down to Jay Sigel in the finals of the USGA Mid-Amateur a year earlier. So, the Sonniers taught my father and me how to swing the club and get ourselves around the golf course. That was a great experience for me.

Were they able to mold you into champions?

Well, my dad became a competent player who could shoot in the mid-80s. I became a low-handicap golfer but not a big-time tournament player, despite my best efforts. I played basketball and golf at our little private Catholic high school, which had a graduating class of 69 the year I got out. I was my full height of 6-foot-3 by the ninth grade, so they needed me to play center on the hoops team.

What was your experience like as a junior golfer and a high school player?

I was fortunate to be from a family that could afford to have me playing in a lot of junior tournaments, so I became very experienced at that level. Again, I didn't win a lot of trophies, but I had a one-track mind when it came to improving as a golfer, and I guess the process and the journey kept me fully engaged.

That was your father's occupation—farming?

Actually, my dad made his living with small aircraft. He started off as a crop duster pilot. When we were young kids he would be flying Piper Cubs all over the farmland regions of southern Louisiana. He had a good head for business and was a person people naturally respected. Eventually he owned a couple of small aviation companies, flying charters out of a various locations. At one point he even owned an airfield, including the service hangars and fuel depot. He was successful at that business for a long time, until the oil-sector crash of the 1980s. At that point he started a residential real estate company, and he's done very well with that, too.

Was your dad a golfer?

He had a membership at Abbeville Golf Club, our local private club with a nine-hole course, but he didn't play golf. My parents joined there so we kids could swim in the pool. I grew up the oldest of five, four boys and a girl, with a pretty large gap between our ages. I was born in 1963 and the youngest, my brother Marc, was born in '83.

Do you have memories of being at the club and looking out on the fairways, wanting to play golf?

Noel got his start in teaching in Southern California before returning home to Louisiana where he has taught for the past 27 years.



How do you mean that?

I had a true hunger to learn about it. I was a teenage kid whose big thing was taking golf lessons, from all different teachers. Back then in Louisiana you could get a drivers license at age 15, which I did, and my folks would let me drive down to Baton Rouge to take lessons from the various PGA pros who were teaching there. Now, my friends on the high school team took zero lessons. So, when I would get home from taking lessons with Tommy Carter or Lionel Hebert—a well-known tour player of his era—my teammates and I would go out to No. 8 fairway at Abbeville with a couple of shag bags and I'd show them what the pros had shown me. That's where my passion for teaching got started.

What did you do after high school?

I went off to Louisiana State, mainly with the idea that I was good enough to walk on the golf team. I stayed there for two years trying to get a spot on the team but it didn't happen.

So you left college?

I did. School didn't hold any interest for me at that point. I had a friend from high school golf in the same situation, David Gary. David had gone to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, again trying to make the golf team as a walk-in and coming up short.

He ended up being a PGA club professional, but at the time he was on the loose and so was I, so we decided to get restaurant jobs and work nights so we could play golf in the day. We were waiters at Stroud's Steakhouse in Lafayette, and we played a ton of golf—I found my game coming back to me and I was still hell-bent on becoming an expert on how the swing worked.

You might have stayed in the restaurant business and become a great Cajun chef.

Not me. I had to find my way into golf. I went to Tommy Carter, who was well respected in the golf profession, and asked him how I could get into the business. He suggested I take a look at the San Diego Golf Academy, which I did. It seemed like a good place for me, so I enrolled there. I arrived out in California a while before classes were going to start. I spent a lot of time at a driving range called the Surf & Turf in Del Mar, next to the racetrack. One day a guy hitting balls a few stations away introduced himself. I told him my name and said I had come out there to be a student at San Diego Golf Academy. He said that was funny, because he had just arrived in town and was about to start work there as a teacher.

Let me guess. A.J. Bonar?

The one and only A.J. He and I became good friends and A.J. was a big influence on me in those early years.



I also spent time with Tag Merritt, and Tag taught me quite a lot. I ended up getting my certificate from the SDGA and then going to work at Rancho Bernardo Inn, a resort complex out there, starting out in the bag room. Eventually I got to do my first teaching as a professional at the Oaks North course at Rancho Bernardo. It was a good experience but I was very interested in moving back to Louisiana, so when I heard about an opening at Lakewood Country Club in New Orleans I put my name in for it. I got interviewed over the phone and I basically got the offer and said yes, all in that one phone call. That was in 1988, so I was 25 at the time.

All good, but now you've got to eat what you kill. Which means you'll have to build a reputation, build your book, attract a following—all of that.

No doubt, but there's where my timing was excellent and I had good fortune, as well. Two very talented young golfers were right there at Lakewood, playing and practicing. One was Tommy Moore, who was the golf icon in our region, the other was Kelly Gibson, a guy who would go on to have a fairly long PGA Tour career. Tommy had played for Oklahoma State and before that he was a national junior champion.

GOLF Magazine recently added Noel to its prestigious Top 100 Teachers list.

Fate kind of threw you together with them.

That's exactly it. We would practice all the time and play together. In that environment I was very loose and my ball-striking was maybe the best it's ever been. With regard to Tommy Moore, I was also a lot bigger than him, so my drives would be pretty far out there and he'd be hitting these 230-yard neck cuts. One day we came around nine and I checked our scores. He had a 34 and I had 38—it was insane how good this guy was at getting the ball in the hole off his tee-to-green game. As we played off No. 10 he hit another weak drive and I said, "Tommy, you swing at the ball like you're hanging off a meat hook." What I meant was that he seemed to have zero connection with the ground. He looked at me and said, "Meet me at the driving range tomorrow morning at 7:30." I started working with him the next day—I ended up coaching him and I ended up coaching Kelly Gibson, as well.

How did that work out?

About as well as you could have hoped. Tommy got his PGA Tour card in 1990 and Kelly got his card in 1991. My first two big students, and now everybody wanted to find out about this new young golf instructor. It boosted my career in a big way.

What else was going on for you in that period?

Seven months after I arrived at Lakewood, the PGA of America held its first Teaching and Coaching Summit, in Dallas. I signed up to attend and when I got there I met up with A.J. Bonar and Tag Merritt and the three of us hung out together. It was announced at the beginning that all professionals in attendance were invited to either of two post-Summit events, one of which was a tour of the Ben Hogan Company factory in Ft. Worth. I had been a Hogan fan and I'd played the clubs so I was keen for that. But A.J. grabbed me and said, "You're coming with me to the clubfitting demo."

If memory serves, that was a Henry-Griffitts event, with Randy Henry demonstrating the system and the lie board and so forth?

Yes, and it was a big eye-opener for me. I personally

went through a fit with Randy and after four swings I was bombing 5-iron shots 200 yards to the target flag, one after another. My own irons were set at about two degrees upright and the club Randy gave me was effectively seven degrees upright. I signed up to become an H-G fitter and that helped my teaching and my business pretty dramatically. Randy became a mentor of mine, both in teaching and in fitting. The more time I spent around him, the less and less I talked to my students during lessons. The idea was to let the ball flight and the feel at impact do the talking.

How long did you stay at Lakewood?

I left there in 1992 and moved to a big municipal complex called City Park, which would later get renamed as Bayou Oaks, and I taught there for seven years. It was a good place to be doing the Tiger Woods golf-boom era. It exposed me to a lot of people, which every young golf instructor needs to do—be in circulation. There was a lot of demand. I was giving 10 lessons a day, six days a week.

Those were big years for the golf-school approach. Did you do a lot with group teaching programs?

Personally I never believed in the golf school concept. I never saw it as a way to help people become better golfers. Certain things you can do well in that context—Aimpoint, for instance, is great in groups. But to me people are unique and the problem-solving needs to be individualized. It can and will take time, but that should be enjoyable for people—the teacher as well as the student.

OK, give us an example.

I would point to a student of mine, Joe, who also happens to be my dentist. He is a great friend who has a great time playing golf with a whole crew of guys. Joe is a stocky, short guy who has short arms and not much flexibility, but hey, he had fun playing golf when he was a 30-handicapper. That's what he was in 1990, when I met him. He called me a one day in 2005 and said he had played that day and shot a 74. I was very happy for him, but I said, "Now Joe, if I told you when we started working together you would shoot a 74 one day, but it would take 15 years, would you have been okay with that, and he laughed and said, "Hell no!" But he progressed the whole time,

and he enjoyed the process. That's how long-term coaching works sometimes.

There aren't too many businesses or professions that target affluent American people with patience.

Teaching anything is going to call for patience, but running a business there is always the reality of *right now*. I was able to become successful without ever really thinking about the money. Now, if we hit a crunch period where there's a lot of cash going out and not a big amount coming in, of course you're going to think about it. That's one of the reasons golf academy owners get creative. This year, for the first time, I offered an

Unlimited Lessons program through the winter, at \$599 for two months, and right away I had 25 golfers sign up. So, that's an influx of cash no business would mind.

What do you think of the Elite Junior market?

We were early with that, and it's a very big revenue area for us. Golf instruction for adults hit a wall back in 2008, so, again we got creative in response to a need. People didn't have money to take golf lessons themselves, but they had money to invest in their kids and their kids' futures. It's a different part of the family budget. I have a guy with four children

who I see drive up in car that isn't fancy at all, and he writes me a check for \$8,000. Of course, his kids are home-schooled, which makes a difference. Golf academies should pay attention to all the home-schooling that goes on in their area. The kids need activities, and they aren't paying a school sports fee—they're a good target market.

There's always a new trend around the corner—is that how it seems to you?

One idea leads to the next, I suppose. You're problem-solving when you're fixing someone's golf swing and you're problem-solving when it comes to the business, itself. On my day off I like to go deer hunting with my son—that's our time together and it's my quiet time away from work. I'll be up there alone, in a deer stand, in the early morning, with nature all around. But then after a few minutes I'll start thinking about my business. **PG**

“Personally I never believed in the golf-school concept. I never saw it as a way to help people become better golfers...to me people are unique and the problem-solving needs to be individualized.”

— ROB NOEL

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Strano Golf Academy at Kelly Plantation Golf Club, Destin, FL - Associate Member.

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Ottumwa Country Club, Ottumwa, IA - Associate Member.

Mucklow Wins PGA of Canada Award



The PGA of Canada has awarded Liam Mucklow its 2015 Tex Noble award, honoring the association member who has done the most in helping his fellow members with their professional development. Mucklow is based at King Valley G.C. in Ontario and was also the 2014 PGA of Canada's National Teacher of the Year. Past winners include Proponent member Henry Brunton. In 2016, Mucklow will be launching his Golf Lab Certified Coach program.



Golf Range Magazine Names the Top 50 Growth of the Game Teaching Professionals



Proponent Group members took 27 of the 50 slots in this year's Golf Range Magazine Top 50 Growth of the Game Teaching Professionals in the recent December issue. No one is better positioned to grow the game than a quality instructor. Congratulations to all of our members on this year's list:

Bill Abrams, Sarah Bidney, Tim Cooke, Brendon Elliott, Jim Estes, Tiffany Faucette, Chris George, Elizabeth Granahan, Mary Hafeman, Doug Hammer, Ralph Landrum, Mike Malaska, Bernie Najar, Rob Noel, Megan Padua, Brad Redding, Trillium Rose, Laird Small, Chris Smeal, Adam Smith, Todd Sones, Rob Stocke, Renee Trudeau, Deb Vangellow, Kevin Weeks, Nicole Weller and Steve Whidden.

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