

LEARN FROM THE TIMBERS AND MAKE YOUR 2017 A RECORD YEAR

by Ian James, RetailTribe CEO

If you work in the northern tier of the U.S. or in northern Europe, most likely you're not looking for extra tasks right now—priority for you is keeping up with the demands of the peak season. But here's a compelling proposition: Do five minutes of extra work each week over the next few months and position yourself to use off-season downtime to ensure a record 2017.

What am I asking you to do? Take two or three photographs of different students each week and make very brief notes about who they are and how they've succeeded under your coaching guidance this year. Then store the photo and notes in a dedicated file on your computer. Not too tough, right?

For background, this is my adaptation of an idea generated by a sport where you kick the ball rather than strike it with a club. I came upon it in Portland, Ore, on a visit to see Declan Bolger, who works for Major League Soccer. My mission was to discover how and why MLS is having such success building strong soccer franchises in many locations around the U.S.

In spending time with management of the Portland Timbers, and studying how they market, we gained some real insights. If you walk around the Timbers stadium complex you'll struggle to find a photo of a player. Instead the walls are covered with huge photographs of Timbers fans—some are individual, some are of families and many show groups of friends who share a love of Portland Timbers soccer. In many cases the folks in the photographs are shouldering the franchise symbol, the Timbers axe.



MLS is having great success building their franchises through marketing their fans passion for the sport. You can do the same for your club or academy.

So, pretty simple stuff. Photos of fans wearing Timbers-logo gear, holding the axe and smiling for the camera.

Let's go for a change of scenery here and imagine the biggest, longest wall in your golf academy or learning center. Plastered across it are happy, engaged golfers, either holding a particular club, or striking a particular pose while wearing a club or academy crest on their shirt or cap.

All this begs the question: What is the soccer club's marketing message to its current and future ticket-buyers? Answer: *"Your passion for Portland and the Timbers is our passion, too."* In other words, going to the game isn't an opportunity for hero worship. It's an evening to celebrate the excitement of soccer while allowing fans to share their passion with others who are like-minded and similarly committed to the Portland community.

The Portland Timbers approach is spot-on with the evolution of marketing and the modern customer. The Gen-X and Millennial customer is far more concerned with what the brand



This simple photograph shows older golfers committed to improvement along with a compliment from the coach. Other older golfers will see it, recognize themselves and reflect. How easy is that for you to do?

can do for their life. They want more than service. They want more than a transaction. They want to be part of something. As teaching professionals, you may shrug off this point and focus on the fact that your customers are from the older end of the demographic scale. Indeed, I hear often from golf coaches about “an older membership that’s not interested in improving at golf.”

Tim Hall is a PGA Professional at a modest golf club with a membership whose average age is nearing 70. Their psychographic might kindly be characterized as “focused on wealth preservation.” Tim replaced a previous PGA Professional who had been a one-person golf staff and was let go. Whatever happened next on the personnel front, there wasn’t going to be another PGA professional. The club had decided there was no value in it. A PGA representative persuaded them to give it one more go.

To say that Tim is a success is an understatement. The staff at this club now consists of Tim, a full-time short-game coach, one other staff instructor and two assistants—again, at a very modest golf club. Programs are full. Events are full. In fact, at this self-confessed “old fart” golf club, there are now two launch monitors and two full simulators.

In his marketing Tim is almost never technical. Like the Timbers, he mostly just shows pictures of his audience—those older golfers—having fun in a group setting in one of his programs. What they see in his marketing isn’t technical coaching, it’s a social, fun experience.

The club and the members can very clearly see that Tim wants to invest in them. He’s not saying “look at me” and how well I teach golf. Instead it’s “look at them” and all the fun they’re having. A simple switch of perspective, from what most instruction marketing attempts to do.

What the Portland Timbers do, what Tim Hall does, what teaching

During the next lull in your schedule, create a “Wall of Success” that celebrates your students’ accomplishments.

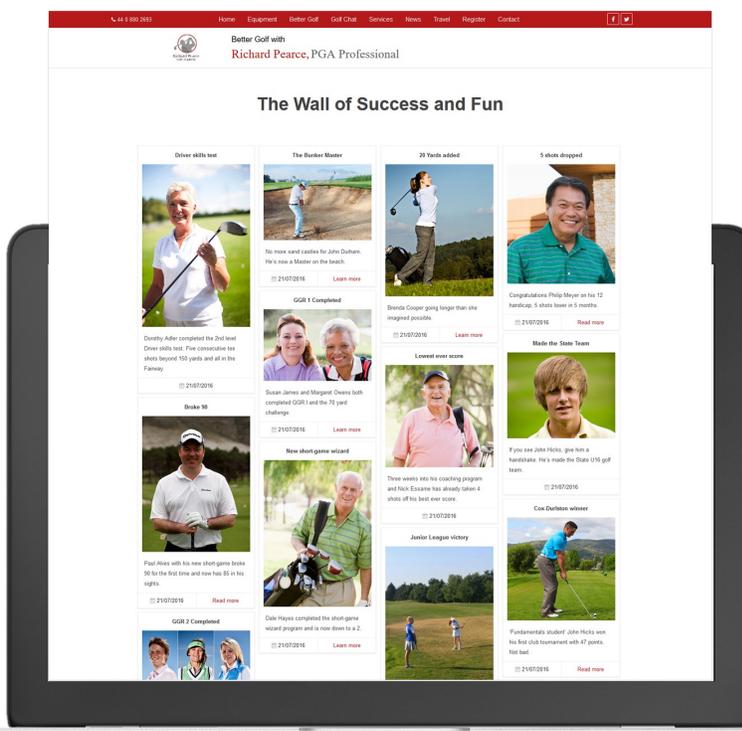
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pros like Dee Forsberg do so well, is going to be simple and straightforward for you to do, as well. And it’s very powerful. So let’s put some energy into it. Each week, take at least two photographs of golfers, making sure they mostly match your target market. File the photographs, along with the name of the golfer and some words to describe the success this player has enjoyed. Avoid describing the technical “how” of their swing change.

When your season is winding down or finished (October or November) and you have more time, create a “wall of success.” This is a web page of pins that uses the filed pictures of your golfers with the details of their success achieved. By the way, there’s no reason a golfer can’t appear more than once, based on multiple successes.

Send out an email to your database thanking everyone who invested in improving their golf so that they could have more fun on the golf course in 2016. Tell people there’s a success wall with golfers who have earned the title “Game Changers” and include the link. Ask people who might have had successes you didn’t know about to send you details. Use your social networks to get the wall out to as many people as possible through November.

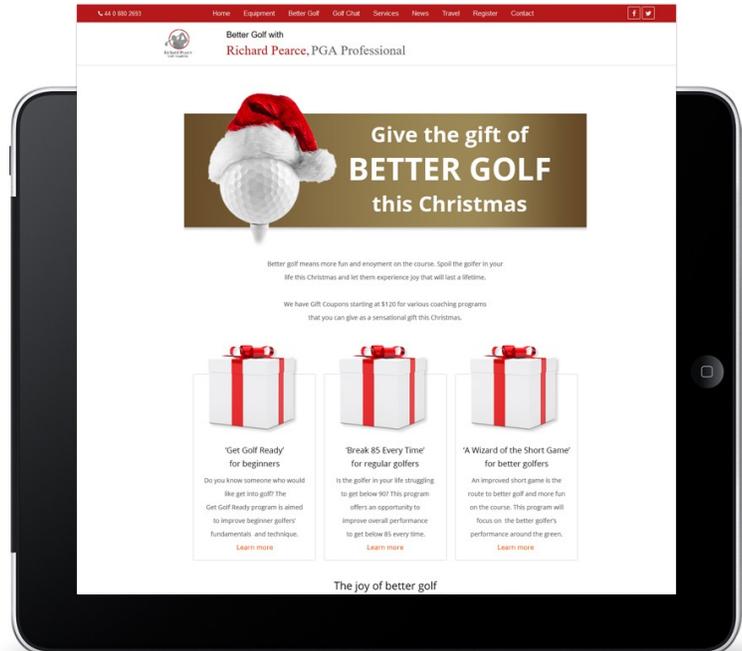
Late in November create some Christmas Gift coupons (“Give the Gift of Better Golf”) and



send out emails and posts offering the coupons for purchase as gifts for friends. Link to your success wall as a reminder of how much more joy a golfer can experience. February and March are “inspiration” months. Find the 16 best successes, and each week send out one email and two social-media posts. Each email should have two of your successes. Create a separate post for each success. Have a link back to your “assessment page,” your success wall and the key programs you’ll be kicking the season off with. If you make this the central plank of your marketing communication from October to March, you’ll be giving yourself the absolute best chance of success in 2017.

Nothing here is complex. It’s very simple marketing that accomplishes four important marketing goals: it’s inspiring; it shows you care about the golfer; it brings some fun to the service; it shows that a lot of people have had great results and enjoyed it.

Make 2017 a great year. Start right away. **PG**



In November create Christmas Gift coupons (“Give the Gift of Better Golf”) and send out emails and posts offering the coupons for purchase as gifts.

Do much less selling in your Marketing



We create Campaigns and Content that inspire golfers to engage with their expert.

For world class marketing designed to drive more customers, contact Rick Williams on 215-622-6324 or rickwilliams@retailtribe.com.

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