

Planning to Sell to the Regular Golfer

By Ian James,
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In speaking with PGA professionals I frequently hear it said that “most golfers aren’t interested in improvement.” In order to fill their lesson books, these professionals feel compelled to cast a wide net—marketing well beyond their club’s membership, when that’s permitted.

Only a small percentage of regular golfers say they’ll invest in coaching

Research into the attitude of club members conducted by RetailTribe echoes what professionals have told us. In our 2014 online survey, only 2 percent of club members said they were planning to invest in golf coaching over the next 12 months.

Now, most instructors would pounce on this data point as proof that they need to attract elite golfers, or ‘never-played-golf-before’ customers, from outside the club. Actually, there’s another narrative to consider, one based on the possibility that we’re not selling what the largest segment of our market wants!

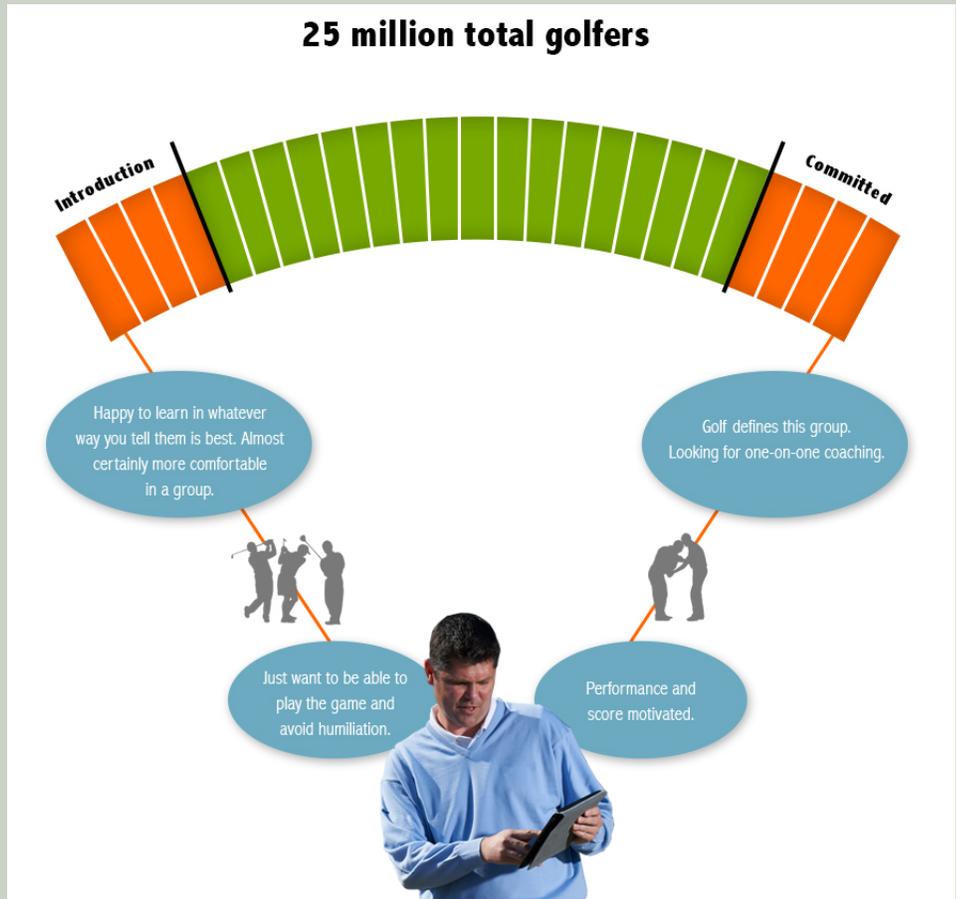
Your proposition talks to learners and the committed

When we look at golf coaches’ marketing it appears that you’re very strong on introduction-to-golf programs. Likewise, you’re doing plenty of one-on-one instruction with the more elite players. Your websites drive this activity. When I click on a teaching professional’s “Rates and Programs” button, I’ll see right away the price of an individual lesson. Under that will be the volume-discount price for a lesson package. Likewise, there are sure to be rates listed for Get Golf Ready and various junior offerings.

On that basis, you’ve got 8 million or so current golfers covered but there’s approximately 17 million who aren’t convinced.

Your offer is not much more than ‘I’m available’

The committed golfers are either performance-obsessed or swing-obsessed. They need you to fulfill objectives they’ve



It’s time to look beyond the obvious instruction-oriented segments of “beginners” and “committed.”

more or less defined on their own. Knowing the price of one-on-one instruction works for them.

Your learners have decided to play golf. They know they need an introductory program of some sort. And, whether it’s ‘Get Golf Ready’ or ‘Golf 101’, many of you have created programs that promise to deliver a result. Great products.

But how are those web pages or promotions talking to the 17 million golfers in the recreational and engaged categories? This group clearly has a significant inertia factor when it comes to any sort of investment in improvement, so we need to work hard to attract them.

Your one-on-one lesson packages seems to have a lower appeal to the recreational/engaged golfers than with the committed group. In fact, it’s almost like they have their handicaps, they’ve got their weekly game or league, and they can carry on just fine under those circumstances.

Imagine you’re a 57-year-old-male, who’s played the game for 20-plus years. You hit it 200 yards off the tee, sometimes. Often it’s only about 170 yards and wide on the right. From 40 yards in you’re not confident you’ll get down in 3, let alone

RETAILTRIBE ON MARKETING

manage an up and down. The word 'hazard' doesn't come close to describing how you view a bunker. You write yourself a 92 but in truth you only just broke 100. You've played this way for years and doubt that it will ever change.

With that golfer in mind, peruse your web site. What do have there, by way of inspiration, products, programs or pricing, that could legitimately speak to this player?

With this golfer you need a more structured approach to selling. Before you dismiss the effort required, if a potential market of 17 million golfers wasn't enough, remember there are probably around 40 million golfers who gave up the game because of the struggle. Many would like to play again.

A lesson in selling

You can divide the market of 25 million current golfers into two categories:

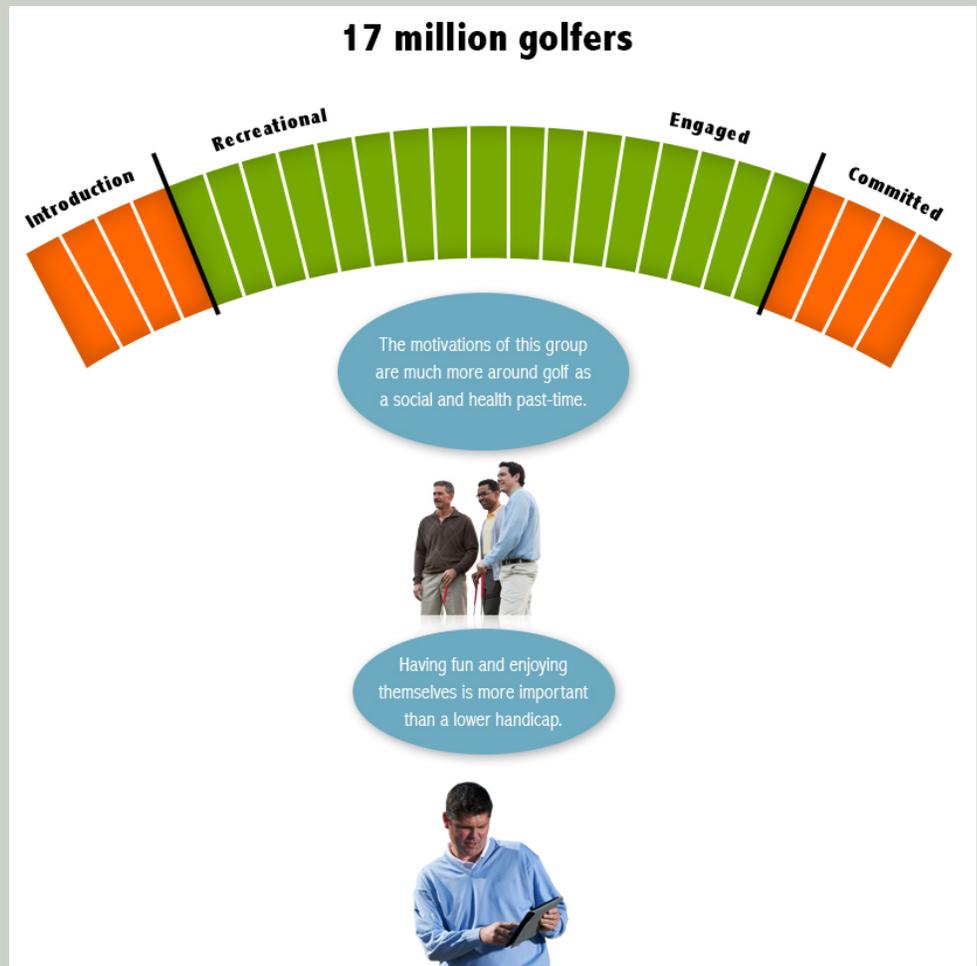
- a) Those who make a decision to buy after identifying a need themselves, and will seek out some person or company to supply it, and
- b) Those who would have more fun if they improved, but haven't articulated that desire or need

The former probably describes our learner and fanatic, while the latter probably describes our 17 million regular recreational and engaged golfers.

If you read most books on how to improve your selling technique, they'll tell you not to dive in and make an offer to your latter group. The selling manual guides the sales person to create a 'call plan' that walks a potential customer through some steps from "didn't even know I wanted a solution" to the point where you can make your offer. Let's think about your version of the 'salesman's' call plan.

We think it's easier than you might imagine, and it involves having fun—something large groups of golfers yearn for. We recommend that, if you're at a golf facility with a large group of recreational and engaged golfers, you should invest time in scheduling and promoting activities that allow golfers to engage with you, in an environment where you can assess their needs and talk to them when they've got a golf club in their hand.

Take the example of Bill Abrams at Balmoral Woods. He scheduled and promoted a short pitching event. It was de-



signed to create fun in 10 minutes for every golfer who participated. It allowed social groups to have their own competition, to laugh with, and poke fun at, each other.

With each individual or group engagement, Bill was looking to move the customer into one of two directions. One was towards an equipment sale. The other was towards the sale of one of a set of short-game coaching programs he had ready.

Best practice selling advice would indicate that you should have intermediate steps available between the event and the sale (clinics, assessments etc). In the engagement with the golfer at the event, you may sense that the golfer is ready to receive a coaching offer. However, in many cases the offer to attend a clinic or an assessment may have a much better chance of success. Remember you're trying to keep as many golfers on your sales pathway as possible.

Why not try this before the season ends? Design each of the components we've shown in the diagram. Decide which components you want to charge for, and what the outcome for the golfer will be, along with the price. (p.s., You need an outcome, even if you're not charging).

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Schedule and run the ‘fun’ event, but make sure you allow time with each competing golfer to review their game and their opportunity to have more fun. Then, with each golfer during that engagement, make sure you try and move them along to another stage on your pathway.

Keith and Bill have proved this works

Speak to Keith Stewart at Springdale C.C. in Princeton, N.J., and ask him if this works. On one Saturday in July 2015 the number of wedges he sold was a fifth of the total number he sold throughout 2014.

I was hugely impressed with the way that Bill Abrams used analysis with the golfer in his event to allow them to see where they needed improvement. Once Bill had sold them on the need to improve, he could move them to the next stage of the sales process – in his case an assessment or a fitting.

A sales pathway example



Fun events that have an element of instruction let social golfers experience the value of hitting better shots.

And just to highlight the size of the opportunity

If you want to calculate the dollar size of the opportunity you're sitting on, ask any good AimPoint Professional how much money they've generated this year from clinics and programs. I know several who have done over \$50,000, selling improvement in the putting game alone.

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.

Coaching works

Big reasons to swing on plane



And golfers will buy a whole lot more from you, worrying less about price.