

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

PGA Show Reality Check: The “core”, fun and Millennials



By Lorin Anderson, President

Bob Carney took a chance on me 25-plus years ago when he hired me at Golf Digest weeks after my college graduation. I found him to be one of the most interesting idea guys in the golf business. He saw the big picture clearly on most fronts. So today when I was scrolling the PGA Show post-show media stories, Bob’s take on this years’ Orlando gathering caught my eye. He made the case that this was the best PGA Show in the past decade and that some very important issues and opportunities began to get the attention they deserve.

One of the issues he was most pleased to see addressed in a more honest way than at past industry gatherings was the decade-long slide in golf participation here in the United States. Core golfers (eight rounds or more per year) account for 90 percent of golf spending and over the past 10 years, we’ve lost one-quarter of all core golfers. Over the same period the U.S. has lost 5 million golfers and – even more troubling – only 25 percent of non-golfers see it as fun. Carney believes, as do I, that the truth needs to be spoken on this subject.

As you know I’ve been pointing out similar statistics for the past few years and have also made the point that many long-term trends are working against golf. People generally have less free time, most have less disposable income and the aging population hasn’t taken up the game as was expected. The post baby-boomers are playing even less golf than the previous generations.

So why bring this up? Because knowledge is power. If you understand that the new golfer pipeline is not going to

automatically refresh itself and you understand that most non-golfers don’t have much incentive to take up the game when it’s not perceived as enjoyable, you can adjust your programming to do a better job of reaching out to potential new golfers and bringing them into the fold. Those who understand this issue will be able to address and mitigate it. Heads stuck in the sand won’t get it done.

Carney also saw the show highlighting two areas that are going to have a big effect on your teaching business in the near future, if they haven’t already: Better diagnostic tools and better ways to collect swing and game data. And, it all keeps getting cheaper!

The fact is if you’re not incorporating significant technology into your lessons, the teacher down the street is. While I’d prefer not to see this turn into an “arms race,” the reality is that the golfer who is spending a lot of money on game improvement is now expecting tech to be part of the learning experience. And, when done well, tech can be a valuable differentiator for your business. As Carney noted, “the show guide featured three-and-a-half pages of digital devices that track balls, trace swings, depict great courses that you can play virtually and measure your progress.”

There also was software that allowed for real-time communication with your teacher such as Edufii. Then there were two companies, Golf Halo and Game Golf that record your shots and stats in the background while you play. This desire to measure and track is a huge part of the game for the next generation. These so called “Millennials” live in a world filled with data, and they want quantitative answers to everything they do. Half the fun for some of these golfers is the charting, tracking and measuring itself.

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