

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

It's Time to Fight Back Against Equipment Ads



By Lorin Anderson, President

I just read yesterday that only 8 percent of New Years' Resolutions are actually followed through. Come on people, we can do better than that! Let's make it a Proponent Group resolution to increase golf instruction participation from its anemic 10-15 percent rate by doing a better job of educating golfers that they will have more

fun if they play better AND that their best route to playing better is professionally dispensed guidance.

There is no one single reason why the vast majority of golfers didn't take any formal instruction during the past year. Sure cost and access to quality instruction hinder some golfers in some locales, but how many golfers bought a new driver or set of irons last year but didn't take a single lesson or even attend a free clinic at their home course? How many golfers paid thousands of dollars in dues to be club members and never took a single lesson? How many golfers didn't take a lesson last year because they felt insecure or intimidated? The number of golfers included in these answers total in the millions.

So how do we change the thinking so that golfers invest more time and money into quality instruction? There are two simple areas where every instructor can do a better job: **Education** and **Sampling**.

Education is the first critical step. When telling the story about how to improve one's golf game, instruction has been drowned out by equipment. More than \$600 million is spent just by the five largest golf equipment manufacturers each year to tell golfers that buying new equipment is the key to improving their games. The total spent on

national promotions for golf instruction is likely less than \$10 million (It's so small no one even tracks it). Therefore, it is imperative that instructors and facilities consistently remind golfers that the most effective route to improvement starts with quality instruction.

For example, continually spotlight the tournament winners who work with you on a regular basis, highlight your new technologies and techniques for creating improvement and showcase the typical gains made by those in your longer-term coaching programs.

The other half of the equation is to provide samples of your instruction capabilities in a non-intimidating setting.

Consider the marketing budgets for major corporations. They often spend well over 10 percent of their revenues on promotions. Since few instructors spend significant cash on advertising, think of free or heavily discounted samples as a significant part of your marketing budget. *Don't be afraid to give away an hour or two each week with targeted sampling programs that will drive new business.*

A few examples might include: A free lesson for each new member when they join your club or a free Get Golf Ready class for non-playing spouses or, maybe, free instruction for all kids 7 and under in a weekly clinic setting to drive more participation in all of your junior programs. You'll know which options make the most sense at your facility, but remember what Godiva has known for decades: If someone tries a free piece of chocolate and they like it, they often end up buying the whole box.

The goal is to create a growing pipeline of new lesson-taking customers and to engage entire families in improving their games and using the facilities more at a time when participation continues to erode. I believe that more engagement in instruction is critical to reversing this trend.

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