

Should Instructors Dive Deep into Customer Relationship Management?

By David Gould, Staff Editor

Golf instructors got along for decades or perhaps centuries without Customer Relationship Management (a.k.a. CRM). Entire careers functioned smoothly with only the simplest tools for keeping track of students. A file box with index cards must have commonly sufficed.

Now flash forward to the 21st century. What you see unfolding goes far beyond a simple upgrade to better record-keeping systems. “CRM is available to people in the teaching profession as part of a full suite of management and marketing tools,” says Jeff Bolton, CEO of Square It Up, the Proponent Group sponsor that serves golf academies and individual teachers. “This technology is basically laying out a new business model for what you do.” To some it would seem like a stretch—you go to upgrade your file of names and addresses and end up with a new business model? Apparently so.

“Our message to teaching professionals is about redefining,” says Bolton. “Instead of seeing yourself as a golf instructor, you identify yourself as a business owner. The business you happen to be in is golf instruction.” The logical progression from old 3-by-5 cards to the new options that Bolton lays out is student-teacher interaction—in all its varied forms. Golfers are out there, interested in playing better, and you’re able to meet their needs and wants via many platforms using a multimedia approach. It goes without saying that your computer has a database of current and recent students. Likewise, you need a means of scheduling their lessons, encouraging their drills and workouts, wishing them happy birthday and even telestrating advice on their latest uploaded swings.

But your database can also contain—or work toward building—a potentially vast sea of prospects. Pondering this, your first thought might be: I don’t have time to teach them all in person. That’s fine, because interaction can take new and less demanding forms.

“If you take advantage of current technology and services,” says Bolton, “you end up creating problems that people always say are ‘good problems to have.’ Along the way, with some assistance, you can already be thinking about solutions.” Build a personal brand while you’re multiplying your contact points and it follows that you can expand your market. An obvious goal as you do this would be to morph from a sole-practitioner to operator of an academy. Another natural pathway is toward online lessons—you end up with a clientele of students you never meet in person.

So, high-efficiency CRM and a big-time growth story for your business do go together. But that pathway isn’t for everyone—at least not in the near-term. Samantha Brotherton, a marketing rep-

resentative at USchedule, which is another Proponent Group sponsor, works with many instructors who are eager to communicate with golfers more efficiently. “Some clients will select one of our email marketing templates, set up a campaign and achieve the goal of being booked out 60 days instead of their more normal 30 days,” says Brotherton. Such a program with USchedule provides the satisfaction of measurability. “When you set up a campaign and target recipients, our system will track the additional revenue this effort produces,” Brotherton says. The more active you get with email marketing, the more targeted your campaigns will be. A partner such as USchedule can group your customers by gender, age, or any other specification and email that cluster a specific message. “Say you’re hosting a Ladies Clinic and need to reach names on your database of women who are 21 and over—you can do that,” explains Brotherton, adding that the clinic email could include a link to that event so the customer can register quickly and easily.

Dr. Jean Harris, based just off Hilton Head Island in Bluffton, S.C., is a Proponent member who brings what she calls an “educator’s approach” to the process of building a clientele. That translates to going light on the marketing, with emphasis on personal recommendations. She writes

twice-weekly golf columns in the Bluffton Sun newspaper to bolster her credibility and keep her name in front of the golf audience. Harris would lean toward a more tech-supported marketing approach if she were able to make headway promoting her “wellness checkup” concept and some other alternatives to conventional lesson-giving, including a supervised-practice product.

Scott Wickham, the general manager for the Tampa-based Inner Circle of Golf, represents a newer sub-category of advanced golf coaching practice. Wickham’s teaching locations and affiliations include a private club, a busy daily fee and a resort, as well—under the aegis of one academy brand. “Our approach is low-volume and based on a pretty intense student commitment,” says Wickham. “We would never want a database with thousands of names, but at the same time we do need to promote.” The approach of the Inner Circle coaching group has lately tilted more toward social media “conversation” and away from the “outbound marketing” tool of targeted email.

Development of your teaching-coaching brand and skill with CRM tend to go hand-in-glove. Experts will say that’s because CRM gives ways to reach a wide audience and deliver value in a variety of platforms and interface methods. Of course, a strong brand means great ideas, methods, learning tools and approaches are being brought to the table. Sometimes, oddly enough, learning about new ways of making contact and interacting with golfers can convince an instructor to create more and better versions of their product.

