

CAREER DECISIONS

The Next Wave is Coming: Are You Ready? How to Analyze Your Next Career Move

By David Gould and Matt Brown

Golf instruction is undergoing a tech-driven paradigm shift. The living proof of this technology upgrade is the fully equipped modern teacher, open for business in his or her golf studio or learning center. As long as that new-breed teacher is marketing his assets and capabilities fairly well, the results will be impressive. They include outcomes such as these:

- The local community has growing awareness of this facility's superior performance.
- Better players come through at a relatively disproportionate rate.
- Parents of promising juniors are particularly inclined to provide word-of-mouth endorsement.
- Players who belong to member-only clubs choose this teacher or academy.
- If there are discerning golf media in this market, they find their way to the facility.
- The teacher(s) who operate the facility enjoy expanded professional and lifestyle options.

Golf instruction was a valuable, viable pursuit back when Tommy Armour sat at his umbrella-shaded table (flask in hand) offering swing tips. It was a noble profession in the naked-eye era of Harvey Penick—have we found anything more useful to tell a student than “Take dead aim”? Surely not.

Be that as it may, improvement opportunities are multiplying and intensifying for golfers. The new tools and new understandings that continue to stream into the category are of course well known to Proponent Group members. What some may not fully grasp is the “macro” consequence of this trend, within the marketplace. Think of this development as a rollout comparable to what happened with Lasik vision surgery centers, or vitamin superstores. Golf had a boom in off-course store openings in the 1980s. Next came a course-building boom, which dominated the 1990s. The decade of the 2000s had a less-noticed but still high-volume, high-dollar trend—and that was golf course renovation, including a landscape-changing tree-removal movement.

As mentioned in prior Proponent Group communications, the 1990s course-building trend opened up new director-of-instruction positions at a steady and even rapid clip. That source of employment isn't available today. But there is one other important point to make, as a follow-up. Those teaching propositions were driven by the simple, we-need-a-new-golf-course-a-day calculation our industry happened to buy into. They weren't based on changes occurring within golf instruction, itself. They weren't being driven by anything like the tech-

nology and productivity upgrade the golf instruction field is currently enjoying. This time around, new energy, new insights, new equipment and new possibilities are flowing into and out of the teaching-and-practice sector, itself.

Currently, a project being worked on by Proponent Group involves mapping geographical markets to profile how well or how poorly they are currently being served by high-tech, academy-level golf instruction facilities. In Lasik surgery, every community of at least 40,000 people is served by one or perhaps more than one vendor. Some surgeon “got there first” and may be reaping the benefits of that first-to-market status, at least partially. Best-practices, state-of-the-art golf instruction will be asserting itself in all decent-sized U.S. markets. Existing golf facilities will initially need to be sold on the concept, but they may end up having to respond to market pressure and

seek out an instructor or instruction team that is in stride with industry trends and capable of supplying the desired skills and services. Are you ready for this potential boom?

In the companion story below you'll find a new-business guide written by Proponent Group Allied Consultant, Matt Brown. It's a highly useful general-business tool to help you assess your prospects for establishing a solid share—if not the dominant share—of business volume in the emerging new-technology version of the golf teaching profession.

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Sizing Up Your Next Opportunity: Some Feasibility Guidelines

As with any new business or start-up, the cutting-edge golf instruction center you've had in your mind for some time needs intense preparation and strategic data-gathering before it can become a reality.

Due diligence is the operative phrase—it has to be exacting and comprehensive but it can still be an enjoyable challenge. Your goal is to mitigate investment risk in the new venture, even as you establish financial backing, and determine if you should green-light the move as you've sketched it or wait it out for the next interesting opportunity.

Below is a simplified bullet list of pre-launch preparations. Keep in mind that there is no hard and fast rule governing this process—it's a mix of prudence and bold resolve. Meanwhile, the golf instruction niche is unique unto itself. By that I mean the professional knowledge and relationships you bring to your work can in some areas substitute for having to have total coverage of the feasibility data points.

First and foremost, is there truly a need for the business you contemplate starting? Many instructors are amazingly good at what they do. However, if one of them decides to set up shop within five miles of a well-established and highly successful golf academy, prospects will be iffy at best.

Once you feel comfortable that you've identified a true market need, think decisively about how you are going to tackle that need.

For example, are you looking at an underserved demographic of potentially elite junior players? Indeed, there are golf academies that have brilliantly leveraged that segment of the market, with robust results. And yet, even if that sector does fuel your early business, when those juniors move on to college or the mini-tours, how will you discover and bring in your next crop?

Rather than focus on youthful clientele, would you consider "outflanking" the competition by setting up a full-bore, full-service, high-prestige academy operation? What will be your long-term sustainable marketing strategy? Will you have the time to create and execute that strategy relentlessly and still teach your lessons, travel and take care of administration?

If you seek financial backing from the traditional and ever-welcome friends-and-family-method, or if you seek loans or a partner, can you prove the evidence of your discovered need and further prove that you will continue to be able to market to that need? Financial backers will most likely want a return defined in a specific period of time. Those who are savvy will want hard evidence that you have done a complete feasibility analysis and validated that there is a need in the market and you can cater to it.

What competitive advantage can you create that distinguishes your business from its competition? This could be the most impactful aspect of your initial feasibility analysis. Even though you may be the best instructor, have the best following, have the best teaching aids, excellent writing credits, and the like, businesses are like young children—they need unbroken attention. Can you maintain those aspects of what you do in an effort to continually support a profitable business? Have you done enough homework to analyze this scenario?

Be able to articulate your chosen market and be specific. Be aware of business trends and other external factors that you may encounter as time progresses. Set up sales projections going out three to five years. Be able to explain how you came up with these projections. It's likewise as you assess what's needed for an initial investment and what the ongoing operating costs will be. Be aware of your competition. This

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advice is obvious but can't be overstressed. We all are in a small, networked industry and often know each other's every move. Those moves can help create or lose competitive advantages to your business. Be aware and learn when to act.

Marketing strategy? Sales strategy? Sales process? For all these vital functions, who is your ideal employee to fulfill them? Although friends and family may be low cost candidates, are they qualified and doing what they really should be doing? Who is your management team? Do you need one? What about an advisory board? If you are planning to teach most days and/or travel, who will run all the necessary activities for you? Once those people are in place, will they be working in the best interest of your business?

The spreadsheet part of your challenge will be ever-present. Do your income and cash flow projections have various milestones attached whereby you can assess how your business is progressing? Do you know how to research this topic and its importance to financial backers?

Then there's structure: What type of business will you form: LLC, S-Corp, C-Corp? For each of these options there will be varying insurance, payroll and staffing implications—so, that's more homework for you to do prior to cutting the ribbon.

These are merely a guideline of what areas a new business owner must think about in order to take a calculated, intelligent step towards successful golf academy ownership. The detail with which you tackle these areas and the time it takes is up to you. Many have skipped a lot of these details and have learned the hard way. Some entrepreneurs have skipped these steps and had success. The feasibility process is intended to let the discerning business owner understand the risks involved and

make a more educated decision about the next course of action.

Depending on who you select for financial backing, some investors will require an in-depth feasibility analysis prior to the actual Business Plan. Much of the information from the analysis will serve the Business Plan which outlines the nuts and bolts of how you as the instructor intend to build your business to service and provide a solution to the discovered need in the market.



Butch Harmon Floridian is a model of the new high-tech facilities being built.

Matt Brown has worked as a Director of Instruction, a biomechanist, an elite junior coach and a director of golf instruction training. He has also been involved in the management of golf academy operations including David Leadbetter's and Gary Gilchrist's Golf Academies. Matt has an MBA from the University of Central Florida with a specialization in entrepreneurship.