



Kerikeri Bay of Islands Golf Club

# CASE STUDY:

## Membership Recruitment

Innovative approaches to attracting new members

## INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO ATTRACTING NEW MEMBERS

Bay of Islands Golf Club Secretary / Administration Manager Stella Saaristo said; "It has become increasingly difficult to attract new players to our golf club."

Saaristo said it is important for the Bay of Islands Golf Club to be open and welcoming to its local community.

"Golf is a difficult sport for beginners to engage with," she said. "There are a lot of barriers that make it difficult for new people to start playing the game."

Bay of Islands Golf Club wanted to address these barriers head on and open the doors to new locals who have an interest in golf with the long term view of presenting them with the option of becoming

members of the club.

"One of our members [who was a novice herself two years ago] came up with the idea of trying to engage more of the locals with the game through an introductory package that had no barriers... we jumped at it."

The Bay of Islands Golf Club wanted to remove the perception that the club was not a place that everyone from the local community could be a part of.

"At the end of the day we wanted to get bums on seats. We wanted to get people here and experiencing the Bay of Islands Golf Club for themselves."

# CHALLENGES



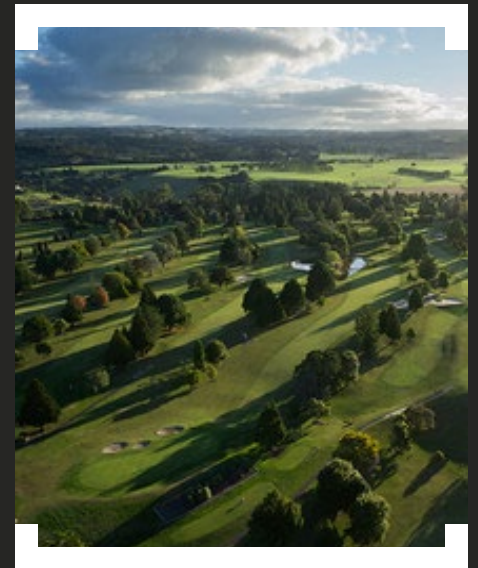
## CHALLENGE OF GOLF

Beginner golfers were unsure if they could actually play the game and enjoy it.



## FINANCIAL INVESTMENT

Beginners didn't want to invest a lot of money in clubs and membership, without knowing if they would enjoy it or not.



## ENVIRONMENT

Often beginners didn't know anyone at the club who they could play with and that made it an intimidating environment.



## SOLUTION

In order to encourage new people to the club, prospective members were offered one month's free golf, free club hire and one free golf lesson with the Club Professional.

"To make sure that we are attracting the right people they must be a local, permanent resident and have never belonged to a golf club before."

The Bay of Islands Golf Club promoted this campaign in its weekly newsletter and encouraged all of its members to tell their friends. To make them feel welcome at the Bay of Islands Golf Club used a "buddy system" that finds the newcomer a club member to play with them and help them engage in the club at a greater level.

"We found this to be a critical factor in the programme's success," said Saaristo. "A big part of joining a golf club is feeling like you belong and that you are welcome. The more people engaged with the club and its members the more likely they would want to keep coming back. At the end of the day it is all about people."

They invited potential members to participate in social golf and non-golf

activities, like bingo nights, around the club. "We wanted to make sure they felt comfortable here."

The newcomers who ended up signing up to the club were a result of the Bay of Islands Golf Club members who made a real effort with the new players.

"The new golfers, who signed up, became hooked through the improvement in their ability but also the engagement and new friendships that they had at the golf club." Saaristo said the project also allowed people to test their physical ability to play the game.

"They may not manage 18 holes, but we can offer them a nine hole alternative. It overcomes the reluctance to buy equipment - if they find they really enjoy the game."

The Bay of Islands Golf Club created a new category of membership whereby these players could play at the club as a 'Novice Member' for \$600 per year compare to \$940 per year (full playing) to ease into the cost of becoming a member.

## RESULTS

**50%**  
ACCEPTANCE RATE

The Bay of Islands Golf Club offered this opportunity to 30 potential new members. They received an acceptance rate of 50%. A total of 15 new novice members joined the club.

↑  
F&B REVENUE

Increased awareness for the Bay of Islands Golf Club in the community and an increased number of social functions. This led to an increase in revenue for food and beverage.

↑  
SALES

Increased revenue at the pro-shop through novice members purchasing golf gear and lessons.

## KEY LEARNING LESSONS

"Everybody likes something for free," said Saaristo. The Bay of Islands Golf Club believed that people can get hooked on golf given an incentive. "The fact that the person does not have to spend a cent to get 'hooked' is very strong motivation."

Kerikeri is a transient town in many ways – "people are always moving on" – The Bay of Islands Golf Club needs to be flexible as a result and offer new golf programmes in the long term to the new people coming into the area.

The Bay of Islands Golf Club benefited from the new member programme. It was most effective when the existing club members showed an interest in the newcomers to the club. "It wasn't surprising that the people who went out of their way to make the new golfers feel welcome and part of the place played a big role in those golfers joining the club."

Saaristo said it would have been far more effective with a greater engagement from their existing membership. "Most clubs are struggling to attract new golfers and it is not just the responsibility of the club to turn that around. It is the members who create the environment that they want to be part of."

The Bay of Islands Golf Club said it is hard to market to a non-golf audience. It has aligned with a local real estate company as a partner to drive the new member programme. "We are excited about the potential of this relationship and attracting new people to the region to come and try the Bay of Islands Golf Club."



## CONCLUSION / SUMMARY

The Bay of Islands Golf Club plans to run with the new member project until the end of 2014 (at least). They believed that a 50 percent success rate was a good result for the club.

"We think it will get bigger from here and could potentially be a great avenue to new golfers at the Bay of Islands Golf Club."

The Bay of Islands Golf Club plans to place flyers around Kerikeri and surrounding areas in the spring to increase exposure of the new member programme. "Sometimes you have to give something to achieve the desired result."

### WHY THE BAY OF ISLANDS GOLF CLUB HAS CHOSEN TO GET INVOLVED WITH CASE STUDY:

"All golf clubs are struggling to attract new members and The Bay of Islands Golf Club is no exception. We believe that if golf clubs have a good idea it is in the interests of everyone to share that good idea. We hope that our good idea can benefit other clubs around New Zealand and we also hope that other clubs are willing to reciprocate by sharing their own success story. We can all learn from each other to build a better future for golf."

For more information visit [bayofislandsgolf.co.nz](http://bayofislandsgolf.co.nz)



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[www.golf.co.nz](http://www.golf.co.nz)

[nzgolf@nzgolf.org.nz](mailto:nzgolf@nzgolf.org.nz)

Tel +64 (0)9 485 3230 - Fax +64 (0)9 486 6745