

Case Study

Understanding Casual Golfers



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Introduction

As golf club managers, administrators and the volunteers involved in our clubs we have a good understanding of our engaged member's needs and expectations. We use surveys and other methods to find out what they require,

expect and sometimes demand of us. But how can we understand our casual golfers better?

Conversations with Casual Golfers

My name is Mark Webb and I am the NZ Golf Regional Support Manager for the Waikato Bay of Plenty area. I am a member of a club but play my golf in a casual manner that is I don't play in club competitions and I tend to play more golf away from my home club.

I actively haunt the first tee looking for casual golfers, and yes you can identify them, to join up with and learn their stories. I identify Casual Golfers as those who are either members of a club (possibly a cheaper membership type) but don't partake in club competitions and those non-members who play the game for serious fun or just fun.

Here is one of those stories and hopefully some lessons we can take from it:

Sunday Golfers

The Story:

A warm sunny Sunday morning and a couple of prime suspects located as I practised on the putting green, both Male in their mid to late 50s and engaged in friendly banter. I asked politely if I could join them as I was alone and the first thing they asked was "Are you any good?" I said "No" and then when invited to join them and tee off first I promptly sliced the ball into the trees. All of a sudden I was one of them.

As we wandered down the fairways I found out that they were brothers in law and had recently joined the club on a special offer. They played on Sunday's at about the same time, they had joined the club because a friend had said they needed to be members, they were regular golfers at another local 9 hole course and the friend who was a member at the 18 hole club gave them the push.

They had not played in any club events and had no intention of doing so. On being asked why they initially said that they didn't think they were good enough. On being questioned a little further they did admit to being a bit worried about their lack of understanding of the etiquette, rules and how the competitions work. (I personally admit to recently googling foursomes so I knew what to do!!)

They talked with enthusiasm about the club and how friendly there were treated and that they enjoyed playing there.

Golf they said was their time away and a chance to catch up, at one point early on in the game Golfer "A" duffed the ball approx. 10 feet wandered over to it picked it up and bought it back and had another go. "These are our rules" they said.

I asked if they intended to join again next year, they were unsure and it depended on how much golf they played and if it made it worthwhile. They also questioned if they would get a bit tired of playing the same course all the time.

Golfer B was contemplating an Ambrose tournament for his work colleagues in the health profession and thought it would be a fun event to have.

As I was only intending on playing 9 holes, with lawns to do back home, I left them at the pro shop where the winner of the first 9 was buying the ice cream.

Interestingly enough they were certainly good enough golfers to play in the club events, they would have parred as many holes as not (occasionally using their rule).

The Opportunity:

A question I often ask clubs is how many active members do you have in your club? By active I mean play club competitions, get involved with social events and volunteer around the course. Invariably I get a response around 30% to a high of 50% of the members.

The 2 above are not alone we have a large proportion of our golfers in the category of playing golf their way, the ones who like to pop out for a few holes in the evening in summer. Or who play on those days when the members aren't there.

A recent trend with clubs has been the decline in competition golf, and a lack of answers as to how to arrest the decline. The above 2 outlined some of the hurdles they would face in regards to competing in golf competitions:

- 1. Etiquette** – a daunting hurdle for the newer golfer, competitions are usually inhabited by the long term golfer who knows how to behave and how to negotiate their way around the course. However they sometimes forget that they had to learn at some stage.
- 2. Rules** – I potentially don't need to elaborate on this hurdle. I don't think their desire to replay a duffed shot will be allowed.
- 3. Competition format** – we sometimes assume that all know what a Canadian foursome is or that all golfers know how to negotiate a Stableford competition.

As clubs we need to look to educate our newer members in a friendly non-confrontational manner and to explain our competitions in plain English and not assume we all know the terminology.

Let's look to engage these unengaged in fun events, shake the rules up a bit and be a bit lenient, I agree there is a place for traditional golf but there is also a place for fun and enjoyment it is a game after all.

We constantly look to question our engaged participants in what they want, but as alluded to this may only be 30-50% of your membership. Do we make the time to talk to the others about what they want? You may be surprised in how they love the game, get frustrated by it and how strongly they advocate the game to others.

Conclusion

You may or may not agree to the comments, but hopefully it may spark you as a manager, board member, committee member or member to talk to those casual golfers in your club. Make use of the simple marketing adage: Understand – Engage – Grow. Remember your Community Golf team is here to help, Phone 09 485 3230 to find out more.