

Using Golf to Grow Your Business – There’s More Than One Way to Hit the Ball

We finished our round this afternoon just in time. The days are getting shorter and the sun had gone down. With a chill in the air, my playing partners and I were anxious to get into the clubhouse and have something warm to drink. “Don’t get me wrong,” Jackson interjected. “Yes, I’m cold. But any day on the course is better than a day in the office.” How many times have you said those exact words?



The truth is, for many of us, the golf course *is* the office. Golf is a great connector and a widely accepted venue for conducting business. In fact, my foursome today consisted of my banker, my attorney and a prospect for my banker. Although we didn’t have a formal business agenda, we spent quality time together, shared a few war stories, and touched on a couple of business situations.

Like any other business, the golf industry is actively marketing and researching to ensure its own future. Even prior to 9/11, trends were down. An industry that had always enjoyed high demand was suddenly faced with needing to market itself. In 2000, the World Golf Foundation created Golf 20/20, a think tank in which approximately 200 golf industry leaders come together to insure the future vitality and growth of the game through the year 2020. Golf 20/20 has fostered initiatives like The First Tee, the national website Play Golf America (www.playgolfamerica.com), Women’s Golf Week, and a national school golf program that is taught as part of the physical education program in elementary schools.

This year’s focus was business and golf. How can the industry grow the businessperson segment of its customer base? “Businessperson.” This implies both men and women. Women tend to have more difficulty than men justifying a golf outing citing apprehension due to time, family, skill, cost, and lack of playing partners, among other reasons. However, these variables, especially the time factor, are not exclusive to women. How can the golf industry bring down these barriers?

During the conference roundtables, we discussed the value of “alternative” golf programs geared to the businessperson, beyond the traditional 18-holes of golf. We heard about an employee golf program that Club Car Corporation implemented in 2005. Amazingly, even though Club Car services the golf industry, the overwhelming majority of the employees did not golf. Starting with ten employees, the company scheduled a series of golf lessons on weekday afternoons. Yes, there was trepidation. And, yes, the results were amazing. The number of participants rapidly increased. Club Car reported a more engaged work force, an infectious atmosphere, improved camaraderie, family involvement and a positive impact on the corporate culture. Beyond golf lessons, there are now internal and customer tournaments as well as leagues. For the employee new to

the game, there is something new in the tool box to leverage for internal as well as external marketing, and personal/professional growth.

Closer to home, Michelle, a business development officer for a bank in Phoenix, is a new golfer. She has fallen in love with the game and her skill set is improving quickly. Although 18 holes of stroke play at a championship course includes several “special” holes (where she might pick up her ball and drop it down by the green), she participates with business associates in scramble tournaments, a 9-hole league, and group lessons. Now her favorite topic, Michelle makes an effort to include golf in the conversation with her clients and prospects. And when they meet for lunch, it’s at the golf course. The strategy is paying off. “But I’ve had to rework my schedule. Sales calls that used to take 45 minutes, I now block 90 minutes. And my client base has grown!”

The golf industry would love to see more 18-hole outings like the one I had this afternoon. And my foursome, I’m sure, would love to play more, as well. Reality, however, says that it’s not easy making the time. Thankfully, using golf as a strategy for business success, as Michelle has proven, doesn’t have to be about 18-holes of golf. Although she is competitive, Michelle is utilizing creative alternatives to incorporate golf, keep her ego in line, and grow her book of business.

What can you do to add more “green space” into your schedule? What can you do to mentor or enrich an associate’s career path through golf? Looking forward to 2006, what will you do?

“Success in this game depends less on strength of body than strength of mind and character.” - **Arnold Palmer**

My hope is that the golf industry and the business community will embrace these non-traditional approaches such that all of our businesses will be flourishing in the year 2020.
Turn Golf into Gold[®]

Debbie Waitkus, a golf consultant, speaker and trainer, is the owner and founder of Golf for Cause™, LLC. She speaks to corporate groups and stages creative golf programs,

The 2002 Starwood Hotel Attitudinal Study findings support the impact of blending business with golf:

- A round of golf is the most valuable activity to get to know business associates and clients well. A business lunch or dinner is a distant second.
- Golf gives you time to know the true character of the person.
- The way a person plays golf is very similar to how he/she conducts his/her business affairs.
- Golf is the best arena for the creation of business deals.
- Playing golf makes clients give you more business
- Executives who don’t play golf are at a disadvantage in business.
- Golf is a good way to relieve business stress.

especially for women, to help them leverage golf for business at any skill level. “Turn golf into gold.”® Debbie can be reached at dwaitkus@golfforcause.com or 602/840-0607. www.golfforcause.com

Debbie’s 10 Favorite Public Courses in the Phoenix/Scottsdale Area

ASU Karsten Golf Course

480-921-8070

great lunch spot, great service, women-friendly course

Camelback Golf Club (Resort Course)

480-596-7050

requires thought - can’t just pull out your driver

Eagle Mountain

480-816-1234

beautiful views, fun course-sponsored events

Gold Canyon Golf Resort (Dinosaur)

480-982-9449

Challenging but beautiful

Kierland Golf Club

480-922-9283

great course for all skill levels, great food

Mountain Shadows Golf Club

480-905-8999

executive course - beautiful views, work on your short game

Ocotillo Golf Club

480-917-6660

lots of water, lots of fun, great restaurant

Papago Golf Course

602-275-8428

always a favorite - it’s the course I learned on

Talking Stick Golf Club

480-860-2221

open spaces, great practice facility

We Ko Pa Golf Club

480-836-9000
great views, great golf