GOLF COURSE MARKETING
IN THE NEW MILLENIUM
DATABASE AND INTERNET MARKETING BASICS
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Executive Summary

Database and Internet marketing are discussed in lots of marketing manuals in the bookstores today. This manual has been written to cover these topics from the perspective of the golf course owner and operator. We will explore with you the basics of database marketing, including reasons for establishing a database, the kinds of information to gather and ways to make data collection easy and fun for the staff and the golfer. Beyond establishing a database, its many uses will be outlined, including generating new golfers, communicating more effectively with the ones you have and maximizing green fee revenue through some trend analysis with the database information.

This manual will take technology one step further and delve into the basics of Internet marketing. Industry statistics on Internet users and golfers will be compared. Experts in establishing Web sites for golf courses will be quoted on the best means of setting up and utilizing a Web site. A detailed list of innovative and creative ways of using this new high tech tool will be explored for both public and private golf courses. We will give examples of some award-winning Web sites and quote from interviews with other NGCOA members on how well their Web sites are working for them. Subjects such as purchasing email lists, online tee times and budgeting for these high tech tools will be addressed.
We hope that one of the first Web sites you will choose to visit will be www.ngcoa.org as we invite you to share your thoughts and comments with us on your experiences with database and Internet marketing.
THE BASICS OF DATABASE MARKETING
Introduction

As the new millennium approaches, what challenges and opportunities does it hold for golf course owners and operators in marketing their courses? Regardless of the year or the century, the goals for any golf course owner are usually the same:

- attract new golfers
- retain the golfers they have managed to attract to the course
- drive additional rounds of golf at a higher average green fee.

New millenium thinking dictates these goals, while important, might not be enough to successfully compete with other courses in the future. The golf experience for golfers encompasses more than simply playing a round of golf. Golfers are looking for golf facilities that provide enjoyable golf experiences and that cater to all of their golfing needs. Therefore golf course operations must be more than one-dimensional or one transactional entities in order to attract new golfers and maximize revenue opportunities. They have to create two-way communication opportunities that help them learn more about and communicate more effectively to their golfers.

A full service golf facility offers a broad spectrum of products and services. This spectrum usually includes marketing golf merchandise, golf outings, golf clinics, golf lessons and other golf services (handicapping, clubfitting, hosting events to meet other golfers, etc.). Rather than broadcast this message to a mass media using a "shotgun" marketing method, focusing on specific target groups of golfers who have expressed an interest would
increase response and therefore be much more cost effective. Golf courses that establish databases with details on their golfers can utilize such cost-effective marketing methods.

Additionally, knowing more about your golfers, their likes and dislikes, will help you ensure their golf experience at your facility is fun - and a "fun" golf experience is critical to creating loyal golfers.

A recent survey on database and Internet usage sent to members of the National Golf Course Owners Association revealed the following:

- 66% of the golf courses have established and maintain a database of information on their golfers
- 26% of the courses responding contact the golfers in their database between two and six times per year
- 85% of those responding have a computer with Internet access at their golf facility
- 71% of those surveyed have Web sites for their golf courses
- 26% of the respondents gather the e-mail addresses of their golfers for communication purposes

Respondents included some of their "best practices" and recommendations for other golf courses using both databases and Web sites. Quotes from those respondents are found throughout this manual.

A flexible, user-friendly database allows a golf course operator to store, retrieve and use facts about the golfers to deliver more personalized
marketing and service. This enables the operator to establish a relationship with the golfer. The relationship begins with the establishment of channels of communication using faxes, e-mails and even telemarketing efforts, appealing to expressed or proven interests of the golfer. Gone are the days that operators must use an expensive shotgun approach, marketing everything to everybody in hopes of increasing responses. This customization and knowledge-building does not have to mean spending exorbitant marketing dollars or working any harder, it simply means working smarter and putting fairly inexpensive technology tools to work. Armed with an extensive, detailed database and a well-designed and maintained Web site, golf course operators can do a far better job of maximizing their overall revenue potential in the new millennium.
Database Marketing Basics

I. Why establish a database?

Have you looked to your left and looked to your right recently? According to statistics recently published by the National Golf Foundation (NGF), chances are you probably have a new competitor in one or both directions. The 1999 edition of *Golf Participation in the U.S.*, published by NGF states there are more than 16,365 golf courses in the U.S., with an average of over 400 new golf courses being added each year. While there are approximately 1.5 to 3.0 million new golfers that take up the game each year, there is an equal amount lost to the game annually for various reasons, according to the NGF. With so many current and newly developing golf courses vying for their share of the golfing rounds, which ones will have a competitive edge? The winners (or survivors!) will be those that do the best job of getting, keeping and establishing a long-term relationship with the golfers!

"It takes a major commitment to properly set up and maintain an effective database. Someone has to take ownership for the establishment and management of the information."

*Jim Zeb*

*Marriott's Lincolnshire Golf Course*

*Lincolnshire, Illinois*

The day to day operations at any golf course can become so time-consuming golf course operators either don't take the time to analyze or lose sight of those things that should be priorities. Operators wear a variety of hats, depending upon the size of the golf facility and the size of the staff. This
one individual's job description may include club manager, director of golf operations, head golf professional, accountant, receptionist and even food and beverage director. Sound familiar? Regardless of the shoes being filled, operators should always remember the greatest asset the facility has is not the golf course, the golf carts or even the clubhouse itself, it’s the golfers. The golfers are the revenue-generators that are the lifeblood of the facility. Gathering information that will enable the staff to get to know and better serve these assets should be the number one priority!

"Do not scrimp on the hardware. The more data you put into the system, the slower it will get. Invest in a good computer and plan for the future."

Cindy Flores, Executive Director
Fraser Valley Recreation District
Winter Park, Colorado

The first important step in building a great database is making an investment in a good computer system for the golf pro shop and any other area of the facility that might be involved in the collection, entry and retrieval of the information. There is a multitude of software packages available in computer stores that have the capability of storing and sorting data. Before making a software investment, research the software package that best suits the objectives to be accomplished with the database. For instance, will the data collected be used to:

- establish a communication link between the golf course and its primary base of golfers?
- do a trend analysis on usage patterns based upon the stored date, day of the week and time of day of the golfers' tee times?
sort by phone number and/or zip code to be able to determine market sectors that are or are not being tapped?

After considering just a few of the possible objectives, make certain the software
- is "user-friendly" and easy to learn
- is simple to manipulate and sort once the data is entered
- provides for simple retrieval of the data once entered
- is easily updated and/or purged
- has cross-referencing capability (allows you to sort by two or more characteristics, i.e., women golfers who expressed an interest in participating in tournaments).

It is also advisable to get a package that has word processing capabilities, so the communication pieces can be written, stored and generated for the various groups to be targeted for the mailings. Many software packages also include broadcast fax and email capabilities. Tap into the knowledge and expertise available through the computer software store employees to help match the software's capabilities with the golf course marketing and communication objectives. Remember there are also some inexpensive sources of information in most communities, including the business or continuing education departments of local colleges. Networking with other course owners, tapping into their knowledge and experience, is always a great source of helpful information also.
"Make sure the software is simple and easy to use for everyone!"

Chuck Bombard  
*Tournament Players Course at the Canyons*  
*Las Vegas, Nevada*

In the survey done to the NGCOA members, the predominant software packages used for database purposes were Fore, Microsoft Access and ACT. Although there was a myriad of other software packages mentioned as well.

**II. Gather actionable information**

Once the hardware and software systems are in place, decisions should be made on the types of information to be gathered. A good rule of thumb in reaching this decision is to collect only the information that is "actionable" or that will be put to use. The question should be asked prior to collecting the first piece of information, what are we going to do with this information? The collection process itself can be challenging and the data entry can be time consuming. All the more reason to make certain the information being asked for is reasonable and actionable. There are three different categories of information that should be considered in the decision making process:

1) Demographic data
   
   This basic information must be obtained directly from the golfer and will include name, address, phone number (work and home), fax number and e-mail address. This is the information that provides the communication channels to the golfers.
2) Activity data

This information is noted by the golf pro shop personnel or starter and is used mostly for trend analysis on usage and spending habits. It includes tee time of golfer (can be categorized by morning, afternoon, etc.), day of the week, dollars spent in pro shop (gloves, balls, other merchandise), guest fees (applies more to semi-private courses where green fees may be prepaid and members bring guests) or a note on the activity the golfer may have participated in. This data will provide some valuable insights into heavy users, usage patterns, identify "big spenders" and help the golf professional fill unused tee times.

3) Interest data

This information, if used properly, can take the golf facility to a whole new dimension of service. The golfer is the best source of this data. It should include the kinds of things that could enhance the golfer’s experience. This data covers the interests of the individual and should include, but may not be limited to the golfer's handicap, desire to take lessons, play in tournaments, participate in clinics, meet golfers of similar handicap levels, receive communications on "specials" on golf equipment or other merchandise.

Once the types of information to be gathered have been decided upon, the data collection methods must then be considered.
II. Who asks for the golfer's information?

"Find a way to make data collection a normal part of a transaction so the staff becomes accustomed to automatically asking for it."

Jeff Hoag  
Scott Lake Country Club  
Comstock Park, Michigan

When you think of data collection in your golf pro shop, do you conjure up visions of some poor surveyor standing in the midst of Grand Central Station trying to stop individuals during rush hour to "ask just a few questions"? Would you rather have a root canal than try to persuade your golf pro shop personnel to get some information on every golfer? Keep in mind that getting all the information you deem important does not have to be done all at once, be gathered by the same person or be collected in only one area of the club.

It was mentioned before that the golf course operator wears many hats. One of the most important roles the manager or owner plays is being the team leader in information management. The entire staff, including the golf pro shop personnel, starters, superintendents, rangers and beverage cart drivers, must understand the importance of gathering, inputting and updating information on the golfers. They must understand this information contributes to the ongoing success of the operation and everyone should be recruited in the process. All areas of contact with the golfer, i.e., the locker rooms, the receptionist area, the golf pro shop, the starter's area, the snack bar, etc., should be equipped with forms for gathering information as
unobtrusively and efficiently as possible. Let's analyze the various points of contact and what information is most appropriately gathered at each point.

First contact - get the basics
Most golfers' first contact with the golf course is usually by phone when they call to inquire about green fees and tee time availability. The golf pro shop fields these calls. The first question that must be asked by the pro shop personnel is "Have you played our course before?" Access to the database at this time is critical, as the pro shop can search for the individual to see if the basic data has already been obtained. If the data is found, confirm the spelling of the name, address, fax and email. If this is a new golfer, obtain these four bits of information. In both instances, then assign and document the date, day of the week and time of the assigned tee time.

Second contact - spending and interest data
The second encounter the golfer has with the club is the day of the golf tee time. The pro shop has already obtained some of the initial demographic data and has documented some of the activity data (date, day and time of tee time). Spending data can be tracked as the pro shop, snack bar and dining room staff can either document the golfer's name on the computer or manually note the name on the receipt for entry at a later time.

Obtaining the interest data may require some ingenuity. Consider offering incentives to the employees as well as to the golfers for filling out surveys. Weekly contests could be held among the employees for most number of completed new golfer surveys turned in. The incentive for the golfer could be a new golf ball for taking the time to fill out the survey, or their name
placed into a weekly drawing for a complimentary round of golf for four. Keep in mind the golfer is intent on teeing off as soon as possible, so concentrate on those times they may be standing idle. For instance, as they wait to tee off, the starter could ask them to fill out a questionnaire. The snack bar or locker room attendants should be armed with the questionnaires for when the golfers come through their areas.

One significant point to make is the questionnaire should be very brief and simple. A sample of a short, but effective questionnaire is found in Exhibit A on the following page. Make certain that all staff members have not only been briefed on getting the information, but where to turn it in once collected.

While all employees should be enlisted in the data collection process, the information manager must make a decision as to who will be "information central." One or two individuals (always have a backup or second individual knowledgeable and proficient with using the database) should be assigned the role of inputting, updating, manipulating and working with the database. Invest in having them take a computer software course to learn all the "bells
EXHIBIT A
SAMPLE INTEREST QUESTIONNAIRE

Rolling Hills Golf Club

We would like to have the opportunity to better serve your golfing needs. Would you be interested in the following (please check):

_____ Private golf lessons
_____ Group golf lessons or golf clinics
_____ Participating in men’s tournaments
_____ " in women’s tournaments
_____ " in couples tournaments
_____ Handicapping service
_____ Receive notice of golf shop sales

Other ways we may better serve you:

_______________________________________
_______________________________________

Please print name:

_______________________________________

Best way to communicate with you:

_____ Fax  (Fax number: _________________)
_____ E-mail  (E-mail address _________________.)
and whistles" the software is capable of doing, thus maximizing your investment in people and software. Make the entire staff aware these are the "information keepers" and all questionnaires should be routed to them.

All future visits - update and expand upon data

While the basic demographic, usage, spending and even interest data may have been obtained within the golfer's first few visits, every time the golfer visits the golf course provides an opportunity to verify, update and expand upon that golfer's information. Remember the most valuable database is one that is current and provides actionable data on the golfer. Make certain the employees are diligent in the role they play in the information-gathering process.

Once the process has been established, weekly questions can be asked that can provide valuable insights into golfers preferences. Different questions could be asked each week. For instance, golfers could be asked what their favorite brand of golf shoes are or what they believe will be their next golf club purchase (new putter, driver, try out one of the new woods?). Questions could be asked on food items they would like offered in the snack bar or activities they would like planned by the pro shop. With a staff that is proficient in data collection, researching opportunities are limitless and very beneficial for the golf course.
Set up a Reward System
Make data collection a fun, competitive thing among your staff. Establish a monthly contest and recognize the staff member who signs up the greatest number of new golfers. A point system could be put in place where monthly winners get small prizes (lunch or dinner for two at a local restaurant) and the overall annual winner gets a couple of days off with pay or a weekend package to some nearby resort. Have departments competing against one another and reward those staff members who come up with innovative ways of getting names and other pertinent information.

IV. Putting the database to work to generate new golfers and revenue

So the hardware has been purchased, the software is in place and the staff has gathered information on over 3,000 golfers. When do we start making money on all this new technology? NGCOA members sent in some of their "best marketing ideas" on how they generate new business using their database. Here are some of their "best practices" that encourage their golfers to use the course more often, attract new golfers and generate more revenue in general.

Start a newsletter
Communicate! Many golf courses generate very simple newsletters (one page, back-to-back for mailers, or two-pagers, front-side only, for faxing purposes) that they mail, e-mail or fax on a monthly basis. These newsletters list the monthly events, some interesting tidbit about the golf
course or facility (recent improvements, additions, famous visitors, charitable or corporate groups that hosted outings that month, etc.), congratulate those who shoot exceptional scores or those making a hole-in-one during the month. It also lists "specials" to help generate play in specific times or targets specific types of golfers. Telling golfers the facility generates a monthly newsletter that offers "specials" and fun activities makes asking and getting their e-mail or mailing address and fax number much easier. The NGCOA has a newsletter template in Microsoft Word that is available to all of the members on disk. The newsletter should also be posted on the Web site and be a part of the monthly maintenance that occurs.

Promotional ideas using the database
Some fun examples of the following promotional ideas were furnished by the graphics department of ClubCorp and are displayed within this manual.

- Sort by birthdays and invite the birthday individual to play a complimentary round of golf on their birthday. Most golfers will bring their buddies to join them. This means one complimentary round given generated three paying rounds.
- Encourage your frequent golfers to bring new guests by giving them one-half off their green fee each time they bring a new guest that isn't already in your database.
- Analyze the slowest days and times of play. Advertise a "two for one" special on Tuesday afternoons or Thursday mornings.
- Encourage junior play and afternoon play by having a "Junior plays free when accompanied by a paying adult" afternoons after 4:00 p.m.
• Ladies morning - double the number of ladies' names in your database when you offer a "two for one" ladies special on Thursday mornings or Wednesday afternoons

• Couples golf - couples twilight golf activities are becoming very popular as working couples come out to play at 5:00 in the afternoon. Host activities that allow couples to meet other couples.

• "Specials" don't need to be limited to green fees, think in terms of merchandising offers. Have a clubfitting Saturday where one of your largest vendors offers complimentary clubfitting opportunities. Demo days are just as popular, allowing golfers to try out a variety of wedges, putters or other new club designs. Vendors, the golf pro shop and golfers all benefit from these offerings.

• Trunk shows are popular where new ladies' lines of golf clothes are displayed. Whereas most pro shops don't carry extensive lines of women's golf clothes, they can partner with a local popular boutique. Advertise the trunk show to the pro shop's list of ladies as well as to the boutique's customer list. The boutique generates sales and new customers and the golf pro shop obtains the names of potential new lady golfers from the boutique's list.

"When we do mailings to our database, we send very colorful, oversized post cards. We want to be sure we get their attention!"

R. J. Smiley
Mille Lacs Golf Resort
Garrison, Minnesota

Successful marketing of events and specials involves multiple repetitions of the message to the appropriate audience. The initial message can be
launched in the monthly newsletter that goes to the entire database and is displayed on the Web site. The advertising of each event is then supported by targeting specific groups listed in the database (i.e., e-mails and faxes go to the ladies for the trunk show; e-mails and faxes go to those with children advertising the junior clinics offered that month). This second stage of communication can only be done if a good database has been established which sorts by the profiles of the golfers. All events are also advertised through displays in the pro shop, appropriate locker room, snack bar or golf cart messages. In prioritizing which events should get the most "coverage" through the advertising efforts, choose the events which have the greatest-revenue generating possibilities. Remember those promotions that get the best response rate do so because multiple means of communication were used to send multiple messages to the appropriate audience.

Personal note - making the difference

Never underestimate the power of the personal touch, adding a handwritten note at the bottom of a mailed flyer or a faxed message. This valuable lesson was learned by an individual working in the marketing area for a televised religious ministry in Dallas. He had personally been in charge of the preparation of one mailing that would go to 70,000 viewers. The letter had been drafted, reviewed, printed and stuffed into the pre-addressed envelopes when he made a disappointing discovery. The letter had no call to action. It didn't "ask for the check" or request that the recipient make any kind of contribution. Without including some sort of a request for donation, he realized the results of the mailing would be disastrous and the response rate would certainly fall far below the historical three to five percent
response rate. The huge dollars spent in preparing the mailing would probably not even be covered by the donations generated from the mailing. He went home that night and began to prepare his resume. He also came up with an idea. He suggested they take some of the staff from the telemarketing group and use their help in putting personal notes at the bottom of each letter. He had heard that the "P.S." portion of a letter is always read before the main body of the letter, especially if it is handwritten on a printed letter. They pulled 30,000 of the letters and wrote notes that went something like, "Mr. Jones, thank you for your generosity in the past. We pray that you can once again find it in your heart to contribute to our ministry. God bless you!" The revised letters were then mailed and the individual said a prayer as they went out. The response blew them away! They generated over a 20% response rate and one million dollars in donations. What could have been the worst disaster of the ministry turned out to be the most successful mailing campaign ever launched! The ministry made certain all subsequent mailings had this "personal touch." The individual left the marketing department of the ministry and now provides "personal touch" direct mailing services through National Print Source in Irving, Texas.

Golf course operators wishing to increase their response rates should experiment with taking the time to add personal notes on some of the promotional faxes or flyers going to the golfers. Track the response rates and see if adding a personal note makes the difference for golfers as well.

Exhibit B (below) shows a post card note easily generated by the word processing function of the database. The manager or golf professional can
have the database sort by number of rounds played and send post cards with a message similar to the one below. A simple handwritten personal message would go a long way in personalizing the post card.

EXHIBIT B

INVITATION FOR A FREE ROUND ON US!

*Our records show you have played ten rounds and we want you to be our guest for your eleventh! This card entitles you to one complimentary round of golf at ABC Golf Course.*

*Simply call our Golf Pro Shop (974-888-7764) to make your tee time and mention you will be using your invitation.*

THANK YOU FOR PLAYING ABC GOLF COURSE!

V. Golfer retention - building loyalty among your golfers

"*We make certain our golfers have fun. We want to provide them with such a good golf experience that they return and bring their friends with them!*"

*R.J. Smiley
Mille Lacs Golf Resort*

Based upon the information provided so far, it would appear that the highest and best use of a database would be to generate new golfers. Not so! The greatest value generated by a database is increased retention of the golfers that have already been generated. Marketing gurus from any industry will confirm that it costs five to eight times as much to generate a new customer (golfer) as it does to keep one that you already have. So how can your
database help make your course the most frequently played course or better yet, "the golf course of choice" among golfers? How do you build a loyalty factor among your golfers that goes beyond simple satisfaction and has them referring your course to others and bringing more guests each time they play? Information that can help in meeting the golfer's needs and providing more personalized service is the key. Going above and beyond the golfer's expectations in providing an exceptional experience is what will keep them coming back and telling others about their experience!

**Getting better acquainted with the golfers**

The database will be the best tool to get to know your golfers. As mentioned before, gathering actionable data and then putting it to use through the communication channels of emails, faxes and mailers helps to keep your facility in the forefront of the golfer's attention. Using this information effectively lets your golfers know you have taken the time and effort to get to know them better and you have an earnest desire to serve their golfing needs and interests. Simple recognition strategies where the staff is trained to call the golfers by name as frequently as possible make such a difference!

You should never underestimate how exceeding expectations can impress golfers and their guests. A golf professional from a small Houston country club constantly encouraged recognition among his staff. He was returning to the pro shop one afternoon and saw one of the club members in the parking lot with an out of town guest. He welcomed the guest and passed his name along to the assistant professional in the pro shop. As the member and his guest entered the shop, they were both greeted by name by the
assistant professional. The golf professional had then gone into the locker room where he also mentioned the member and the guest to the locker room assistant. Once again, as the two entered the locker room, the member and guest were greeted by name. The guest was amazed. The staff then passed the guest's name along to the starter and the driver of the beverage cart who also greeted the member and guest. The guest was blown away and the member was bursting with pride at the staff's performance. The guest returned to his hometown where he was serving on the Board of a new, very exclusive golf club under construction. When it came time to search for the golf professional, he related his story of recognition and hospitality and vowed the best golf professional would be the one from the Houston club. Even though the Board had received over 300 resumes of professionals interested in the position, they extended the offer to the Houston golf professional. Flattered at the offer, he deferred the opportunity to his assistant professional who subsequently got the coveted position. The club's practice of greeting all members and guests by name had produced a defining experience in the career of the young golf professional. They had created a system to provide greater member and guest recognition that produced "wow" experiences.

"Wow" experiences are exceptional experiences that exceed golfer's expectations. All golfers have stories about golf facilities that went above and beyond the usual service. They were the facilities whose staff immediately greeted the golfer, took their golf clubs and put them on the golf cart. They were the facilities with the friendly shop staff who made golfers feel welcome and made certain they were able to tee off on time. Their staff was once again there as they returned, cleaning their clubs and
putting them back in their car. These facilities were memorable because they provided service that some of the finest, most expensive country clubs offered, but without the expensive dues and initiation fees. Other "wow" experiences that can be provided by knowing the golfers better through the database include:

- **Golf merchandise preferences** - knowing the golfers that are frequent purchasers in the golf pro shop allows for some "personal shopper" opportunities. For instance, one of your golfers may have a preference for a certain style of golf shoe. Whenever a new shipment comes in, a fax or e-mail to that golfer offering to set aside a pair would almost certainly impress him and guarantee a sale.

- **"Play with the Pro" opportunities** - Most golfers have never had the opportunity to play golf with a golf professional and would love to do so. Take the most frequent players (search the database for those who play three or more times per month at the course) and do a drawing each Saturday where the winner and two guests are invited to return and play nine holes with the Golf Pro. What a great way to get to know and recognize the most frequent golfers!

- **Handicap** - gathering handicap information on the golfers allows the golf professional the opportunity to introduce golfers of similar handicap and encourages greater camaraderie. Not only does introducing golfers of similar handicaps encourage greater usage, it provides a personal service encouraging friendships among the golfers.

- **Family details** - how impressed would your golfers be if whenever you were hosting a couples, junior or women's golf activity, you sent a special e-mail to them because you knew they might be interested?
It's like a shoe store sending you an email whenever they get a shipment of your favorite brand of shoes. They took the time to single you out and communicate something they knew you might have an interest in.

- Professional information - golfers who are new to a community are often looking for others to meet and play with. Knowing those who wish to meet new individuals in order to enhance their businesses (insurance salesmen, bankers, investment brokers, etc.), enables the golf professional to be instrumental in helping to generate new business and new friendships.

- Corporate needs - many corporations host corporate golf outings to entertain clients and/or generate business. Offering the golf course's services in setting up and handling the details of these outings makes it much easier on the corporate executive in charge.

Retention - a focus issue

Golf courses that have databases, depending on the number of golfers, should target mailing each month to one-twelfth or quarterly to one-fourth of their golfers. Many courses send a monthly newsletter to the entire database. It is important to communicate as frequently and cost effectively as possible to the names on the database.

While everyone knows retention is important, most realize it is impossible to "retain" every golfer! So instead of "shotgunning" your entire database of golfers with marketing efforts, focus on those golfers that contribute the
most in terms of value to your golf course. Which golfers would you consider to be your "best" golfers in terms of contribution to the golf course?

"Identify the 20% of your golfers that are providing the 80% of your business. Find out what they like and make certain you provide it!"

Ian Shepherd
Stoneybrook Golf Club
Orlando, Florida

Consider a number of factors such as frequent players, players who come and bring new visitors each time, players who spend greater amounts in the golf pro shop than the average golfer and golfers who host outings at the course. Another "best" golfer attribute could be those who are celebrities, politicians or other "movers and shakers" within the community. Simply having these people seen playing at your course may cause others to play there as well. These are a few of the attributes that may go into identifying your "best" golfers. Database sorts can be based on spending amounts, frequency of play, "movers and shakers" category and even number of new visitors hosted. Once the characteristics of a "best golfer" have been considered and these golfers identified, a strategy for focusing on this group should be implemented. This targeted, focused marketing approach makes recognizing and rewarding your "best" golfers much easier.

VI. Yield management - using the database to fill unused tee times!

"Target your anticipated slower days 30 to 60 days in advance and mail or e-mail to a select group of your database the opportunity to reserve tee times in advance at special rates. While it takes some advanced planning, it works great for us!"
Being able to sort by usage, day and time of play, will be of tremendous value in filling unused tee times. It also will allow the golf course to maximize the green fee charged on various days and time of day. For instance, you find that you can shoot a cannon off on the golf course and not hit a soul on Monday afternoons or Thursday mornings. Searching the database for all those who have played these times in the past (as few as they may be), allows for a targeted mailing to those who have proven interested (or able) to play these times before. Doing a targeted communication to this group and offering premium rates to play on Monday afternoons or Thursday mornings is a good start. Other groups who may have flexibility in play times would be retirees, non-working spouses, etc. Search the database for these profiles and add them to the communication list.

One good example of obtaining names to add to the database, as well as maximizing green fee revenue comes from Larry Galloway, the club manager at Queens Harbour Country Club in Jacksonville, Florida. Larry has a database of more than 10,000 names. He divides those names into categories of frequent players ("A" list) and mails a certificate every six weeks to this group. The certificate allows the golfer to make tee times three days in advance at special discount rates. The amount of the discount varies depending upon the day of the week and the time of the day they reserve the tee time. Both the individual's name and the green fee quoted are placed on
the tee sheet. Obviously, those requesting a Saturday morning, 8:00 a.m. tee time will pay "rack rate." Those requesting the less desirable times, i.e., Sunday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. are quoted a greatly reduced green fee.

Once golfers arrive at the club, both the golf pro shop and the starter have the tee sheet and are aware of the golfer's name and the green fee that was quoted. The starter requests that the other three individuals in the foursome fill out the certificate with their names and addresses in order to receive either the exceptional tee time or the discounted green fee. Larry has his staff update his database daily and those who have not responded are moved to the "B" list. If all tee times are not filled after contacting the "A" list, e-mails are then sent to those on the "B" list who then have the opportunity to call in three days in advance to book their tee time at a discounted rate. This system works great for Queens Harbour and allows Larry to provide special incentives for frequent users and to fill the tee times at optimal green fee rates.
INTERNET MARKETING BASICS
I. What is this "Net" thing all about?

Technology in the last twenty years has seen some major advancements that have become such an integral part of our daily lives, we can't remember what we did without such things as cellular phones, fax machines, e-mail, etc. In reality, most of these technological tools, including the Internet, have come about within the last twenty years. For instance, in the early 1980's, "facsimile machines" were found in very few businesses because of the expense factor. They cost several thousand dollars and took upwards to five minutes or more to transmit one page! Yet, at the turn of the century it is estimated that 50% of the homes in the United States will have fax machines or fax modems.

So how has this new technology impacted golfers and golf courses? Marshalling the golf course from the golf shop is now made possible through satellite positioning systems. Golfers take their offices to the golf course as they stay in touch using their cellular phones from the golf carts. Laser printers have greatly advanced the quality and quantity of printing done at the golf pro shop. Fax machines and emails now make communication instantaneous. It is predicted that the Internet and its benefits to any individual or industry go far beyond those of the fax machine or cellular phones.
When people refer to the Internet, they often are talking about facts they have researched, incredible interactive sites they have visited or people they have met and conversed with from around the world. The Internet is a worldwide network of computers, allowing access to an unlimited number of information sources, both printed and in person. The Internet allows access to the Library of Congress or entry to a chat room where medical doctors are discussing the latest advancements in medicine. Children of all ages are using the Internet to do their homework. Retirees are one of the largest demographic groups of "surfers" who research topics of interest and meet others with similar interests through the Internet.

II. Who's using the Internet and are they golfers?
Just as golf course owners explore the audiences of any new media they may be thinking of using, so too should they understand the Internet audience. Is the profile of the Internet user consistent with the profile of golfer you would like to target? The Web site (www.AOL.com) of one of the largest online service providers, America Online (AOL) provides the following statistics on AOL members:

• 15.5 million adult users
• 60% married; 40% single & other
• 51% female; 49% male
• 41% graduated from college or more
• 55% have household incomes of $60K+
• 21% have household incomes of $100K+
• Median age of their members is 37
How does that profile compare to the average golfer? In their 1999 study entitled, "Golf Participation in the United States", the National Golf Foundation (NGF) described the demographic profile of the core golfers as the following:

- There are 26.4 million golfers age 12 and over in the U.S.
- Approximately 5.4 million are avid golfers, i.e., they play 26 or more rounds per year.
- Today's typical golfer is male, 39 years old, has a household income of $65,775 and plays 20 rounds per year.

The statistical comparison of the typical golfer and the typical Internet user basically points to the Internet as being a potentially excellent source of communication and advertisement. This can be true only if the Web site of the golf course is properly positioned through the primary Web browsers so that it can be found by those wishing to find it!

III. Why should a golf course establish a Web site?

While there is a myriad of reasons (and we will explore a lot of them in this manual) to establish a Web site, below are some of the primary ones:

- A Web site can be the least expensive, most effective tool used in marketing a golf course.
- It can provide a "high touch" or personal relationship between the golf course operator and the golfers, even though it is a "high tech" tool.
• It allows for communication to an audience as close as the neighborhood in which the golf course is found or as far away as China.
• It provides immediacy when someone inquires about details on the golf course or other operations.
• It allows for two-way communication, giving feedback via chat rooms or e-mail messages.

Integrating the Internet into the overall marketing strategy allows for twenty-four hour advertising of the golf course and all that it has to offer. Geographical hindrances fly in the face of a golfer three hundred miles away being able to see the best holes of the course or the layout of the banquet space through pictures on the Web site. Whereas a Web site may not totally take the place of printed advertising and brochures, it can certainly enhance them as a second and much more animated source of information. Another unique feature of the Web site is that it can be interactive, allowing a golf professional to give golf tips via an established chat room at an advertised, appointed day and hour.

Success using the Internet means integrating into your total marketing plan. Paul C. Black, the owner of Golf WEB Designs believes, "a site is only successful if it is part of a total marketing package." He cautions golf course owners that the Web site cannot be the "sole source for generating rounds played, memberships or real estate sales." Included in the Appendix section of this manual are two articles written by Paul Black focusing on Web development and marketing for golf courses.
IV. Establishing a Web Site - Where to Begin

One of the fun things to do on the Internet is to shop around. Whether you are considering establishing a Web site or already have one (71% of the NGCOA respondents to our survey already have a Web site), take a look at some of the various Web sites and explore the possibilities. The NGCOA has a chat room for its members at www.ngcoa.org. Rather than "reinventing the wheel," ask some of your peers for their Web site addresses and for some advice.

One of the first steps in establishing a Web site is to choose an Internet Service Provider (ISP). There are local, regional and national ISP's and more ISP companies coming online everyday. Begin with those listed in the yellow page section of the phone book. How to choose? The golf course owner should consider the following in choosing an ISP:

- Cost - the more comfortable you become with the Internet, the more online hours you will clock. It is best to find a service with a flat fee that offers unlimited usage. The usual cost is around $20 per month. The fee usually includes unlimited Internet access and ability to establish an e-mail address, receive e-mail and set up a simple Web page. That fee will vary depending upon the extent of the Web site and whether such capabilities as "chat rooms" are desired.

- Profile of member/user - If you wish to advertise with the ISP you choose, check out their user profile. You can usually find it in the "advertising" or "about us" section of their home Web site.

Advertising on the Web usually involves "banner advertising" where
your facility's name and Web site are flashed at the top of a page of a primary Web site of your selection.

- Speed of ISP modem - there is nothing more aggravating than waiting because the ISP doesn't have the most up-to-date equipment. Compare modem speeds as you shop around and factor the importance of your time into your decision. Test the speed of the ISP by logging into a Web site hosted by the ISP and see how long it takes.

- Maintenance staff - make certain the ISP has customer service and call to make certain you can get help when you might need it. What are the hours of customer service?

- Additional services - most ISP's provide e-mail, researching capabilities, access to professional communities and advertising capabilities.

Outline your primary objectives for having a Web site

After exploring some impressive Web sites and choosing an ISP, decide just what you want to accomplish with your Web site. Here are some of the possibilities:

- Create awareness - If someone is "surfing the net" for golf courses in your area, you certainly want to be among those that are listed in the primary search engines.
• Generate new business - A Web site can provide detailed information on tournaments, corporate outings, clinics, etc.
• Communicate more effectively with current database of golfers.

In order to guarantee your Web site can be found, it is very important to establish a simple, yet effective domain name. Your domain or Web address should speak to the name of the golf course or some easily identified derivative, i.e., [www.abcgolfcourse.com](http://www.abcgolfcourse.com) or [www.abcgolf.com](http://www.abcgolf.com). Registering your Web site through primary search engines like Yahoo! is as easy as going to the Yahoo! site and choosing the primary categories or key search words under which you wish to be found and entering your Web site's "url" or address.

**Research Web Site Design and Maintenance**

Depending upon your list of objectives and the extent of your proposed Web site, you may decide to seek out a Web site designer that can assist in a professionally designed and maintained site. Review some of those Web sites that impressed you when you were exploring the Internet. E-mail the site and ask for their Webmaster and the entity that maintains the site. Once again, refer to the yellow pages. Just as with other forms of advertising, you may even find a service that would exchange design and maintenance fees for green fees.

**V. Integrating the Web Site into the Overall Marketing Plan**
"Our Web site answers a lot of questions and serves as a great reference when people call asking for more details. It provides immediate detailed information which most inquirers want."

Edward Utz, Director of Marketing
Faldo Golf Institute by Marriott
Orlando, Florida

For Edward Utz, the director of marketing at the Faldo Golf Institute in Orlando, their Web site goes far beyond simply being a communication channel. He finds when people call for information, they would much rather access a Web site than wait for a brochure to be sent through traditional mail channels. His target audience is usually inquiring about golf school packages and group outings. They want "immediacy" when it comes to information and reservations. Their Web site, [www.gofaldo.com](http://www.gofaldo.com) can provide that.

Another Web site that serves as a great example of how advertising can work on the Web is [www.twelvebridges.com](http://www.twelvebridges.com). This Web site was chosen as the number one site for arts and recreation in the Sacramento area by the Sacramento Business Journal. Not only is it a colorful, fun, well-designed site, but it provides the browser with all of the following:

- Employment opportunities at the club
- Calendar of events
- LPGA events hosted at the club
- A detailed layout and interesting facts on the golf course
- Banquet menus and pricing
- All clinics, camps, special events, etc.

Rhonda Richards, the director of marketing and Sales for Twelve Bridges Golf Club in Lincoln, California said having the Web site is a great
advertising and follow-up tool. Not only does it help generate new business, it helps to provide better service to others who book outings, clinics, etc. It provides an additional means of communication via email.

These golf course operators would contend their Web sites achieve their primary objectives because they have been integrated into their overall marketing plan. For instance, the Web site address is printed on all stationery, business cards and other brochures generated by the facility. All advertising, whether it be in the local newspaper, on billboards, travel magazines, coupon offerings, etc., includes the e-mail address, just as you would include the phone number. The Web site is used to enhance all other advertising, marketing and public relations messages. It provides an immediate and inexpensive means of providing greater detail, introducing pertinent staff and a convenient connection to that staff member via e-mail.

VI. Now that we have a Web site - what do we use it for?
Advertising the broad spectrum of opportunities at the facility is one of the best ways of using a Web site. A Web site can allow an individual to actually "tour" the clubhouse and see the banquet or outing facilities. They can see some beautiful photos of the golf course and details of the course layout. Pricing for everything from green fees to major meetings is also at their fingertips. They can view all of this from their own office once they are given your Web site address.

The McMahon Group, a consulting firm in St. Louis that does extensive private club consulting recently did a survey asking club managers for information on how they use their Web sites. While the survey in its entirety
can be found in the Appendix section of this manual, here are a few of the suggestions the managers listed:

• History of the club
• Pictures of members, events and families on a "social page"
• Golfer comments or complaints
• Equipment and clothing orders from Pro Shops
• Monthly e-mail newsletters to database
• Tournament scores and winners
• Contact page for clubhouse listing staff names and extensions
• Course condition and work being done now and in the future
• Chat sessions with managers/golf pros
• Directions, maps, hours of operations
• Links to other sites (weather)
• E-mail directory of golfers
• Classified advertising from golfers

While this list was provided by private club managers, it certainly would apply to daily fee or resort courses as well. As more and more golf facilities establish and utilize Web sites, this list of uses and opportunities grows.

VII. How do Private Clubs use Web sites?

Bill McMahon of the McMahon Group believes a Web site can be a great communication tool for a private club. Not only does it allow a club to communicate directly through e-mail to its members, it provides the
opportunity to post the club's newsletter and details on club happenings where all members can have access. A private club may or may not have need of the marketing capabilities a Web site can provide in attracting new members or additional rounds of golf, but it can help increase member usage through direct communication or reminders of club events. The Web site can provide all the benefits to a private club that it does to a public one, i.e., advertising golf events, banquet and outing capabilities, etc. It's just that it provides the information to a defined, limited audience rather than to the public. Web sites for private clubs can be established with password protection, allowing only club members to access proprietary information on the club.

VIII. Online Tee Time Systems
Another aspect of the Internet which impacts golf course owners and operators is online tee time systems. Many golf course owners and operators are researching the pro's and con's of online tee time services. There is a multitude of services that begin with reserving tee times on courses nationwide and range all the way to "golf portals" that link to travel services for golf packages at resorts, golf outing locations, equipment purchases, golf schools and even weather sites. Online services can be regional as well as local in scope and vary widely concerning the fees they charge and who incurs the fees (the course receiving the booking, the golfer making the tee time or both). When deciding on whether to go with an online tee time service and which one to go with, the NGCOA can be of help. They have produced a "Tee Time Reservation System Special Report." Beyond researching the systems themselves, the NGCOA went one step further in May of 1999 and held planning meetings in conjunction with the American
Hotel and Motel Association HITIS initiative, to discuss business functionality and case studies of courses using tee time reservation and other booking systems. The result of these meetings was a base document outlining standards for tee time reservations and other booking activities. It was agreed that following the meetings, a "beta" test of the standards would be done. Once again, consult the NGCOA Web site at www.ngcoa.org for the most up-to-date research findings and recommendations on online tee time reservation systems.

IX. E-mail Lists - to use or not to use?

Just as with direct mail, there are "list brokers" who sell lists of e-mail addresses that supposedly have been researched for common interests. More and more is being written on e-mail and its effectiveness, but most articles and other publications discourage purchase of these lists and encourage establishment of your own private e-mail list. To purchase a list of thousands of e-mail addresses and send e-mail messages advertising your golf course is called "spamming." This is a violation of Internet etiquette and is considered "junk mail" that irritates a lot of the recipients. "Spamming" does not apply if the golfers have freely given you their e-mail address as part of the information-gathering process, or have visited your Web site and asked for further information via their e-mail address. Although some golf courses view the purchase and use of these e-mail lists as a way of reaching those who aren't aware of their Web site or golf course, others believe it is not worth the cost or risk of angering the thousands of e-mail recipients who receive the message.

X. The Marketing Budget
The NGCOA surveyed its members in 1997 and asked what they spent on marketing. The golf course owners that responded spent on average 2.6% of their annual gross revenues. Interviews with other marketing professionals in the golf business indicated that expenditures range anywhere from 1.5% to 5%, depending upon the revenues of the course and the stage of development. Many golf courses in the development or newly opened stages have to spend more to introduce the course the first year.

Where are the marketing dollars allocated?

The median annual marketing budget for the polled group of NGCOA owners was $24,600, with the individual median dollar expenditures being broken out as the survey shows in the Appendix section of this manual. Because of the differences in markets, profiles of players, and kinds of media available in various geographic areas, this survey should serve only as a general outline as to what advertising and media opportunities can be considered for marketing budgets.

What marketing costs should be budgeted for Web site design and maintenance?

In researching the cost of Web site design, it varied as widely as the costs of buying a new car. Design costs ranged anywhere from $1,000 for a simple, no-frills Web site to a $25,000 site that has extensive graphic design and such things as chat room capabilities. Once again, follow the recommendations of the earlier sections of this manual in clearly defining
your goals for your Web site and how you intend to use it. Contact a number of Web site designers. Many will even discuss trading out green fees or memberships for their fees.

Maintenance costs must also be factored into the marketing budget. There is just as broad a range for maintenance costs as there is initial design. Many facilities utilize college students or train staff within the facility to do the maintenance. Your options should be weighed once you determine how extensive your maintenance needs to be. Keep in mind, maintaining the Web site so that golfers return to it again and again, is just as important as the initial development.

As golf course facilities begin to establish Web sites and collect e-mail addresses there will be a shift from paper to electronic communications. The more costly direct mailing using the mail system will be replaced by e-mailing from the Web site. Yellow page advertising can be replaced by advertising in the Web's yellow pages. Once again, database and Internet marketing are primary and supplemental parts of the overall marketing plan. As their effectiveness in reaching the golf market is proven through higher response rates, the Internet will then become a much less expensive, more effective marketing tool.

XI. Having said all that ....
Today's technology provides us with great tools like computerized databases and the World Wide Web. The simple establishment and management of a database can provide any golf course owner or operator with the most valuable list of golfers, the ones that have played their course. A database
can be used to generate new golfers, new revenue and to help retain the
golfers you have already attracted. It can be a great yield management tool,
helping to analyze usage trends and to fill unused tee times.

The Internet affords golf course owners and operators an opportunity to
launch a tremendous new multimedia, interactive, communication and
advertising campaign. It can be the least or the most expensive item in your
marketing arsenal. Web sites can be established with minimal effort or
professionals can be used to maximize all the bells and whistles a site can
provide. But to be effective, it must be integrated and woven into your
overall marketing plan.

As fast as the Internet is growing and golf courses are discovering its
benefits, we believe subsequent editions of this manual will be useful in
keeping all of you updated on uses and opportunities. We hope you have
found some pearls of wisdom in this manual that you will find helpful in
marketing your golf course. More importantly, we invite you to e-mail us
information at www.ngcoa.org and share with us your database and Internet
marketing best practices so that we may quote you in our next edition of
**Golf Course Marketing in the New Millennium - Database and Internet
Marketing Basics.**
APPENDIX A

Internet Articles for Golf Courses

Provided by:

Paul C. Black
Golf WEB Designs
Interco@intercosys.com

(These articles were reprinted with the permission of the author)
APPENDIX B

Private Club Internet Survey

Provided by:
Bill McMahon
McMahon Group
APPENDIX C

NGCOA Marketing Budget Survey
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Mike Tinkey, National Golf Course Owners Association
RECOMMENDED READING

The Internet for Dummies, J. Levine, C. Baroudi, M. Levine Young

Online Marketing Handbook, Daniel S. Janal

Net Gain, John Hagel III, Arthur G. Armstrong
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Kathy O'Neal has been doing membership and club market research work for more than twenty years. She received her B.A. from The University of Texas at Austin and her M.B.A. from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. She has worked with private country clubs, public fee and resort courses both nationally and internationally, including projects in Canada, Mexico, Ireland, Singapore and Bangkok. She is married and has two children. Ms. O'Neal is the Senior Vice President of Membership at ClubCorp in Dallas, Texas.