Planning, Promoting and Managing Successful Golf Tournaments and Outings

I. Introduction

Tournaments and Group Outings are an important part of most golf facility’s operations. In many situations, the tournament and group outings can represent a significant portion of a facility’s annual operating revenues. It is common knowledge that outing groups generate more “per round” revenue than the general golfing public. Additionally, outing groups will play in marginal weather where the regular public player or club member may “opt out” on such a day. Even in a private club scenario (see special addendum from the PGA of America), tournaments play an important part in maintaining member enthusiasm and strong club affiliation. For a ‘for-profit’ organization, the tournament and group outing activity can represent a significant amount of work and planning. Typically, large group events are booked far in advance. The large group bookings must be completed in advance of standard tee times to enable significant blocks of the courses available tee times to accommodate the group. These bookings can also require a great deal of time management as several groups may be booked into the same times or same days in order to maximize the use of the course. The planning, scheduling, coordination with group organizers, financial arrangements and event management are very demanding. For manual operations, the work is very time consuming. Effective managers will look for the right tools to minimize the manpower required to manage large group events while maximizing the guest experience to ensure repeat business.

Group Outings fall into several categories. These categories include a corporate outing, a special interest “golf association” which varies in regard to their focus (fellowship or competition), or actual tournaments sanctioned and organized by the facility itself. Typically, in a public or semi-private facility booking outside events, any group in excess of a defined number of players constitutes a group. Any group with the minimum number of players, generally 20 or more, would need to meet certain criteria in order to reserve tee times which would otherwise be available for normal tee-time reservations. Typical requirements for group bookings would include deposits to reserve the tee times and player lists or exact numbers for the group. Groups will usually need to enter into a contractual agreement with the golf facility to maintain the reservation. Group Outings can be made up of a large group of players simply wishing to play at the same or close times or there may be requests for event management with a specific format of play and scoring. These more organized outings are generally arranged by an association or corporate/company organizer. The organizer will interface directly with the golf facility and will be the central point of contact for all arrangements.

Golf facilities also put together their own tournament and group events (sanctioned and self-conducted). Generally a tournament will be established with a specific format of play and the event advertised for sign-ups or registration. In a for profit facility, the event will carry an entry fee that will cover green fees and a prize structure. The entry fee can also include the cart rental fees, depending on the operating philosophy. This kind of event can generate green and cart revenues and can also provide revenues for the golf shop operations with the prize structure being redeemed in merchandise.

II. Planning Club Promoted Events
For a Club promoted event to meet with any degree of success, it will require a certain amount of planning and research. Professionals and facility managers should meet with active groups and associations utilizing the facility to determine the kinds of events that will be the most desirable. Facilities with strong Men’s and/or Ladies’ Associations will likely need to develop formats that are more formally structured. Research of member preferences will determine whether events should be developed for individual competition, team competition or a mixture of both. Events being developed for the general public may be more successful with less structured formats such as the ‘team scramble’, which can be structured for players of all skill levels to participate. Mixed events, whether a Scramble or other more structured format (see format and contest suggestions later in this document), are also popular in that they enable mixed partners to compete in events together. To organize a successful event, an operator should do enough research to determine the type of event and format that will be the most popular with the majority of a facility’s market. It may be that several formats will be in demand in which several events can be developed. Once a successful format or formats are determined, the events can be repeated annually where they will continue to grow and can often create opportunity for additional events.

Once a format of play for an event is established, it is up to the professional or event organizer to structure the event to be equitable for all players. The individual competitions with structured formats will appeal to the more competitive players. These events can be broken into divisions of handicap ranges (flights) to create opportunity for all players to compete within their skill ranges. Similarly, a less formal event such as a Mixed Scramble, will have a better chance of succeeding as a repeat event if it can be structured in a manner where all players or teams truly have a fair chance at winning. In a team environment, this can be accomplished with team handicap adjustments. Even if players do not have handicaps, it is still possible to create equity across the field with the right tools. Teams can be structured by player skill levels, such as ABCD skill level teams where each team includes players from each skill level. It is also possible to develop handicaps for non-handicapped players based on their scores for the round. Several utilities, such as the Calloway Handicapping or Peoria Handicapping systems can establish a handicap for a player based on the scores they post for the event round. It is also possible to create team handicaps based on the individual handicaps whether actual or ‘post-round’ handicaps. Team handicaps can be developed to ‘level’ the playing field regardless of the skill levels making up each team. For example, the USGA recommendation for a 4 person team scramble event handicap adjustment would consist of 20% of the ‘A’ player’s handicap, 15% of the ‘B’ player’s handicap, 10% of the ‘C’ player’s handicap and 5% of the ‘C’ player’s handicap. In this scenario, a team made up of handicaps of 2,4,5 and 8 could compete equitably with a team having handicaps of 15,22,24 and 28. The first team would have a ‘team handicap’ of 1.9 while the second team would play to a handicap of 10.1. Using similar adjustment techniques, handicap adjustments can be developed for any kind of team make up. Team handicaps can then adjust the actual ‘gross’ scores for an event to a more equitable ‘net’ score from which awards are given. Events can also be structured with both ‘Gross’ and ‘Net’ divisions are paid in the prize structure. The event then becomes many events within a main event where players have more opportunities to win and more opportunities to compete equitably. If players feel they have a fair chance at winning, they will be more likely to come back to an event over and over again regardless of whether they actually win a prize for any particular event.

In addition to ‘flights’ and gross and net payoffs, events can also be structured with many side games. The side games create more opportunities for players to compete for prizes, increase the fun and variety of an event and also create additional revenue opportunities for a facility. Side Games can be setup with additional ‘Buy-Ins’ to create additional and separate prize structures. Side game prize winnings can be converted to golf shop merchandise similar to the main event prize structure. Side games can include a multitude of formats. Simple, and popular, side games include ‘Gross and Net Skins’ where the buy-in
is divided among outright low scores on any hole among the participants. Side games do not need to include the entire field. Only participants wishing to compete in the additional events need to enroll or ‘buy-in’. The ‘buy-in total’ then creates a purse for the participants only. Side game or ‘Sub-Events’ can include skins, games, ‘Par 3 Only’ holes, ‘Par 5 Only’ holes, individual competition within a ‘team’ format or a different team make-up within a team event. While the ‘Side Games’ make an event more difficult to manage, the opportunities for additional revenue and the excitement they can add to an event, generally make it worth the effort. A good tournament management software program will facilitate the process of managing multiple events. The following are format and contest ideas for group and competitive outings:

Formats – most popular formats for a golf tournament

1. **Scramble** is the most popular format. In the scramble, a group plays as a team. Each person hits their own ball, the team selects the best shot of the players, the other members of the group pick up their ball and play from the selected spot. This process is continued until the ball is holed out. Each team will have one score on each hole. This format can be used with 2, 3, 4, or 5 players.

2. **Best Ball** – This is a team format. All golfers play their own ball until the ball is holed out. At this point record the best score from the team. Do this throughout the 18 holes. The final score that is recorded is the best score from the combination of the team. This format can be used with 2, 3, 4, or 5 players.

3. **Alternate Shot** – This is a two person team format. Both players tee off, select the best ball out of the two, the players ball that was not select hits the next shot, the player who did not hit the next shot then hits the next shot, alternate shots are taken until the ball is holed out and that score is then recorded.

4. **Six, Six, and Six format** - This is a two person team format. The first 6 holes each team plays a Scramble format, the next six holes the team plays a Best Ball format, and the last six holes the team plays an Alternate Shot format.

Contests - most popular contest for a golf tournament

1. **Longest Drive** – Select a long straight hole (normally a par 5), whoever hits the longest drive on this hole wins a prize. A proximity marker is placed by the ball that is hit the longest. The ball longest ball must be in the fairway. A long drive contest for men and women is recommended.

2. **Straightest Drive** – Have the golf course draw a chalk line down the middle of a fairway. A proximity marker is placed by the ball that is hit closest to the chalk line. The golfer that hits the ball closest to the chalk line wins a prize.
3. **Closest to the Pin** - Is held on a par 3. The golfer that hits the ball closest to the pin wins a prize. A proximity marker is placed on the green to mark the ball. Recommend having one CTP contest on the front side and one CTP contest on the back side.

4. **Longest Putt** – Can be held on any green. A proximity marker is placed by the ball that is the furthest away from the hole. The golfer or team that holes the longest putt wins a prize.

5. **Professional golf clinics** – Have the PGA Professional golf staff conduct a clinic/exhibition.

6. **Hole In One contest** – This is conducted on a par 3. Based on the prize a witness might be needed. The players who makes a hole in one on the designated par 3 wins a prize. Hole in one prizes can consist of cars, boats, trips, cash and merchandise. Contact our hole in one companies for quotes. [www.eplangolf.com](http://www.eplangolf.com)

**Contests that generate revenue**

1. **Mulligans** – Sell mulligans. A mulligan is an extra shot or a redo that can be used at anytime throughout the round. Prior to the golf tournament starting select a designated spot to sell mulligans. This can normally be done at the registration table. Mulligans can be sold at any price. Recommend price is $5, $10, $15, or $20.

2. **Raffle Tickets/Door Prizes** - Sell Raffle Tickets. This is fun for everyone. At the end of the round at the awards ceremony start drawing tickets. For every ticket drawn a prize is given to that player. It is up to the tournament committee to gather prizes for this contest. Prizes can range from dinners, golf, merchandise, etc. Recommend price is $3 per ticket or $5 for 2 tickets.

3. **Silent Auction** – All items are placed on a table with a bid sheet attached to each item. Individuals can then start bidding on the items. Bids can be made prior, during and after the event. Designate a cut off time. At this time award the winners. The way to make the most money with an auctions is to have the prizes/items donated. Great prizes are trips, golf, sports memorabilia, merchandise etc. If you purchase a prize make sure you start the bidding at the right price to pay for the item.
III. Marketing, Promoting Club Events

A facility sponsoring a tournament event will need to advertise and market their events through sign-up sheets, flyers distributed and posted at other facilities and through Web Site promotions. Once an event and format of play have been established a flyer or marketing piece should be developed. The flyer can then be posted in all conspicuous areas of a facility and distributed to neighboring facilities for posting. It is a common practice for facilities to post each other’s event flyers as it is a benefit to all operations to reach a broader audience. Cooperation between neighboring facilities also helps in scheduling events to avoid competing for players in the same time frames.
Web Service Promotions and Marketing

Events can also be promoted from a facility’s web site and through web based services. If a facility is regularly updating their web page information or using a web service for tee-time reservations, it is a natural place for advertising and promoting a facility’s outside events. A facility sponsoring a tournament event will need to advertise and market their events through sign-up sheets, flyers distributed and posted at other facilities, press releases, and through Web Site promotions. Web services like eplangolf.com will create a free web page for an event and provide online player registration. Eplangolf’s online player registration can be linked into your facility’s website and appear to be just another page in your existing site. This is a great way to generate traffic to your course website. Flyers can be posted in all conspicuous areas of a facility and distributed to neighboring facilities for posting. It is a common practice for facilities to post each other’s event flyers as it is a benefit to all operations to reach a broader audience. Cooperation between neighboring facilities also helps in scheduling events to avoid competing for players in the same time frames.

Once an event is booked, the service may also manage the participant reservation process for a facility.

Utilizing the Internet can be an innovative way to promote your golf course. All golf courses should have a website and strive to make them “interactive”. Web sites that are simply a static “electronic brochure” are nice, but will not attract repeat visitors. Online tee times, online handicaps, online tournament entry are all ideas destined to encourage your clients and potential clients to return to the website (see an example at www.keetonpark.com). In addition to having your own golf course website, web services are also available to help promote a golf facility and their events. Tournament services like www.eplangolf.com will solicit and market to golf tournament planners for you. This service will give your course Internet exposure and allow you to receive golf tournament referrals or request for proposals. Once the request for proposal is receive by the golf course you contact the tournament planner directly to book the event. This request for proposal referral will have all the vital information such as contact name, group name, address, phone, email, how many players, event date, time, and food & beverage requirements. This service is another way for golf courses to increase tournament rounds.

Ways to promote and market your golf course:

- List your course on tournament service web sites
- Advertise and utilize “online registration” for tournaments and programs such as junior clinics
- Host junior golf events
- Register on various search engines
- Attend trade shows
- Hold a tournament planners focus group meeting
- Hold a VIP tournament for customer appreciation and potential tournament group customers
- Advertise in publications
- Speak to an alumni group, a civic group, or a youth group about golf
- Direct Mail
• Broadcast email (specific to an interest group)
• Join meeting planner associations like MPI and ASAE

**Online Tournament Registration Example**

![Keeton Park Golf Club](image)

**Keeton Park Golf Club**
2323 Jim Miller Road
Dallas, TX 75227

Phone: 214-670-8784
Fax: 800-887-2859

**DATE:** August 25th and 26th, 2001
**TIME:** 11:00 AM
**ENTRY FEE:** $30.00 plus green fee/cart fee each day. Must have played in two prior KPGA events during 2001. Winner goes to the Dallas Morning News Tournament of Champions.
**ENTRY DEADLINE:** August 23, 2001

**REGISTRATION FORM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player 1</th>
<th>Company Name:</th>
<th>Player Name:</th>
<th>Address:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

City, State, Zip:  
Phone:  
Email:  
Disability:  

**PAY with a CREDIT CARD**

Name:  

[ ] Visa  [ ] MC  
Expiration Date:  
Total Amount:  $
The event planner or course operator does NOT have to be a computer guru to create this type of promotional and administrative opportunity. It is simply an outsourced web based service that is affordable and many times free. It is a matter of taking the initiative to utilize the service.

How to attract a Tournament Participant

There are hundreds of golf tournaments in your courses surrounding area each year. How do you differentiate yourself to attract a full field? You must ensure more than just a day at the golf course, you must provide a unique experience. On course contests are a great way to attract participation, as well as, provide entertainment for your guests. Companies like Sports Fantasy Tours out of Dallas can provide trips to the masters for participants who hit it within 5 feet of the hole. Numerous hole-in-one insurance companies can provide insurance for cars, cash, boats or trips for any participant that makes a hole-in-one. The course can devise free contests like playing an entire hole with a 5-iron, or using a local celebrity to hit a shot on a par-3 with each group. You must be creative when trying to attract players.

Using Tournament Participant Data for Future Marketing

Whether you are a private club or a daily fee facility, tournament participants are a valuable group to use for future marketing. Collecting participant data from tournament participants can be very easy and inconspicuous. Suggested methods are to hold a drawing for a free round of golf where each participant fills in a form to be entered into a drawing, or have each participant fill out a cart liability form, or use eplangolf.com’s online registration and have a spreadsheet with participant data e-mailed directly to your course.

E-mail addresses are invaluable way to be able to market for free to tournament participants. Whether your course is looking to attract daily fee rounds or members, e-mail is a proven way to get a golfer’s attention. Software systems such as Fore! Reservations allow a golf course to easily capture player demographics and do email marketing to your entire or a portion of your customer database.

IV. Manage Cost Effectively with the Right Tools

Setting up an amateur tournament or group outing is very time-consuming. In a typical 144 player, four person team scramble event scheduled for a shotgun start, many hours of preparation work are required. The event must be scheduled into a time-managed space that maximizes the use of the course for other play. A course may typically have multiple events needing to be managed in the same day. Outside group events typically require contractual commitments from event organizers as well as name lists and pairing information. Financial terms must be established with typical deposits to justify blocking valuable tee-times for group events. Rental clubs may be a factor and the type of clubs and individuals needing them must be identified. Prior to the arrival of the group, many event organizational reports must be prepared to insure an orderly start for the group.
The work to prepare all of these event presentation and management materials is significant. For a facility managing large groups manually, many hours are involved in preparing contracts, scheduling the events with others and in producing the event organizational materials by hand, it can take several hours. Large scoreboards for a group requesting scoring, when prepared by hand, can take from two to four hours alone, depending on the size of the group. Scorecards and Cart Cards prepared with names and handicap strokes is also a very time-consuming process.

With the power of computers and specific software applications, effective managers will look for a software program to help manage these tasks. They will also look for a software program that will create event presentation and operating materials that will create a strong impression with the event guests to promote repeat business.

The right Tournament Management Software program (TMS) can provide the answer many facilities are looking for to handle their tournament and group outing business. A tournament management software program should address a facility’s concerns for saving time and providing high quality presentation materials. A good tournament manager program should also be extremely easy to use for rapid name entry and have the ability to import names from a spreadsheet prepared by the organizer. The program should also be able to accommodate any kind of last minute change. Typically, the group coordinator is organizing the event in their spare time and depending largely on the golf professional to do most of the work. It is almost a standard to have many name changes, additions, deletions and team players switches just prior to the event. A good software package must be able to rapidly handle all the last minute change and quickly produce replacement pairing sheets, cart cards, scorecards and scoreboards.

A good TMS should provide a total solution for a facility. The golf professional does not want to have to use one program for producing outing contracts, another for producing pairing sheets, cart cards and scorecards and yet another for score entry and results reports. Yet this is exactly how many clubs currently manage events. A good TMS program will handle all event management requirements from the beginning contract administration functions of booking events, generating contracts and reviewing booking reports to managing the event with complete tournament presentation and results report capabilities. The program should also provide the highest quality reporting capabilities such as the ability to print directly to a facility’s own scorecards for any event and to have the ability to produce large color scoreboards for the event. For quality presentations, a tournament management program should have logo management utilities to enable a facility to watermark all reports with either the golf course logo or the sponsoring client’s logos.

A good TMS program should also be extremely flexible in its capabilities for handling multiple kinds of event formats, very accommodating to making changes and adaptable for providing custom presentation materials. Every club has their own method for setting up and managing events and there probably aren’t two in the country who do it the same. A good TMS program should be flexible enough to accommodate each facility’s unique needs. One way to handle a facility’s unique needs is through customization. A good TMS program will either give the user the ability to design their own reports and layouts or the software provider will develop custom reports for them.
V. Using Tournaments/Outing Management Software

A. Contract Administration

With Contract Administration features, a Tournament/Outing Management Software program should enable a facility to create group contracts with information about the event, number of players, type of format of play, time of start, any event specific information and all financial requirements. The Contract should be designed for signatures of the parties to create a commitment by the group for designated tee times.

The Contract Administration Program should provide reporting capabilities to print, or show on screen, all booked groups over any date range with number of rounds and revenue commitments subtotaled by month.

The program should also enable a facility to establish budgets for a period or season and produce reports with actual bookings compared to budget with variances.
A Contract Administration program should also automate the process of sending customizable Welcome Letters to acknowledge and the booking and to present the contract. The program should also be capable of automatically generating a follow up letter to thank the group and refer to any attachments for surveys or other response documents to evaluate the success of the outing.

**B. Setting up the Event/Event Presentation**
For many facilities, whether private, municipal or resort, tournament presentation is a very important issue. Tournament play, for many clubs, represents a very large part of the business model. Event presentation for all clubs is important for many reasons – insuring that the client perceives value for course selection, insuring that members feel value for membership fees and providing incentive for guests and organizers to select a facility again. Presentation consideration is the reason a club will invest many hours in preparing materials for a tournament outing at any club level.

Starting Reports with pairing and alpha lists must be prepared to assign players to carts and tees or times for the start of play. One page reports, to avoid having to sort through pages, may also need to be prepared for Cart Personnel to direct players to carts or for placing rental clubs on carts.

Cart Signs placed on the golf carts will help players locate their assigned carts and hole assignments or starting times.
Scorecards need to be prepared with the team participant names on each card and depending on the format of play, handicap stroke holes identified for each player. High quality tournament management software will enable a facility to print directly to their own scorecards with all applicable information in the correct positions including: names, initials, event name, start times, start tees, team number, handicaps and hole ‘dots’ where applicable.

Group outings often expect or request a large scoreboard or some group scoring sheet to be prepared with all player names on the board ready for final results to be entered at the completion of play.

All reports should be of very high quality with the ability to select watermark graphics to be displayed in the background. There should be a utility to enable one or more graphics to be selected by the user to enable a golf facility logo to be displayed or one or more for a group or corporate sponsor.

C. Scoring

TMS software should provide options for scoring for the simple formats to the complex. There should also be several types of scoring options. For example, a small corporate outing may want scoring reports for a simple scramble format. An event manager will want a simple way to enter total round gross scores for the event and have the program calculate net scores to enable very rapid reports for the event final results. On the other hand, an event may require complex score calculations for a multi-person team where 1 gross score and 2 net scores are being calculated for the team score. This kind of event would require hole-by-hole score entry for all players with the program selecting the low gross and 2 low net scores for each hole.

The TMS program should accommodate both simple and rapid score entry events as well as the complex format event where multiple side games may also be taking place such as Skins Games or individual formats within a team event. Users should be able to set up the type of score entry they want to use to best fit the event and format of play.

Tournament Management Software should also be able to make extensive and complex handicap adjustments for individuals and teams for any event. Additionally, the software
should be able to interface with multiple Handicap Associations or programs to enable a user to automate the process of updating database member handicap indexes. In a facility where many handicapped events occur such as Men’s and Ladies’ Association events or regular league play, handicap management will be an important utility. Updating player’s handicaps for events can be extremely time consuming and automating this utility is essential to a tournament management program.

Tournament Management Software must also be capable of scoring events and to produce results reports including purse payouts. Group and Tournament Outings are a value to a facility in occupying revenue generating tee times and can often be scheduled into times more difficult to fill making them even more valuable. Groups can also bring additional revenue to a facility with prize or purse structures where the payoffs are redeemed in the golf shop. Payoff structures for an event can be very simple to extremely complex. Large events could include multiple flights with unequal numbers of players where the purse setup for one flight might be completely different from another. The places paid for gross places may also be different from the places paid net. Typically, if a player wins a prize for a gross place, he cannot also win on the net side so the program will need to perform elimination. The program should also have the capability of determining how to pay a player the highest possible amount which can be difficult to determine where ties are encountered. This is just another area where a tournament management software package should provide the ability to make all calculations and determinations of purse awards automatically to eliminate the time and frustration required to do it manually.

VI. Setting up and Managing Leagues

Leagues are an excellent source of consistent revenue for the modern day golf facility. Leagues tend to be corporately sponsored or at least initiated by a corporate recreation or employee group. Traditional league play involves booking tee times at the same course on a weekday evening with a weekly nine hole competition. A very popular format involves keeping “point totals” from week to week with the ultimate winners being determined on a season long basis but also with prizes for weekly play. Formats vary, but a popular one is the two person team playing nine hole match play on a handicap or “net” basis. There are three points involved each week and they are determined by two “one vs one” matches and then another point for the TEAM match or TEAM score for the nine holes.

A TMS program that allows the administrator to create random or flighted pairings with the ability to accumulate standings week to week is a big plus when it comes to administering a league. Leagues often establish a “substitute” list so when a given player cannot play on a particular week, he or she is responsible to line up their own “sub”.

Weekly leagues can be tied to a weekly food and beverage program, a package price on range balls, etc. so they are good opportunities for “add on sales”. One should note that quite often, folks that play in a weekly league are the same people involved in the decision making process regarding other outings and tournament groups. As a result, providing the special attention that is required to effectively manage a league has potentially large positive benefits.

Leagues are another prime example of how to effectively administer a program via the Internet, as well. Simply keep the weekly standings on the web would put your course “ahead of the crowd”.

Additionally, having email “hyperlinks” to the substitutes would be an important communication service.

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