

Parting Shot

Pro Shop Smarts

Tips from the South

by Lorne Rubenstein

Remember when scorekeeping pencils had the simple message asking players to "Patronize your pro." It was a reasonable suggestion.

But these days there are many alternatives to purchasing at the golf course. Pro shops therefore have to go the extra mile to get the customer's attention, not to mention his or her credit card number.

Think of the modern situation this way. Golfers everywhere want to save money and also demand fine service in pleasant surroundings. These are their criteria when they're shopping for non-golf items, and so they have come to expect the same when looking to purchase golf merchandise. Off-course shops recognize this and most provide an environment where golfers don't mind shopping at all; and in fact often make them their first stops.

Can you blame them? Of course not. But perhaps you can encourage them to come back to pro shops, and even to make them their first stops.

While I was visiting the pro shop at the PGA National Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida recently, it occurred to me that there are many ways to enhance a pro shop and make visiting there a pleasant experience. Here are some suggestions based upon what I saw.

First, keep the shop neat. Allow the customer room to move around and to examine items comfortably. Neat is, well, neat. Clutter is a turn-off. I'm out of there! If you're a course owner or you run a pro shop, surely you wouldn't invite a guest into a cluttered home for dinner. It's equally important to make your customer feel welcome at your pro shop; it's much easier to do so with a clean and well-lighted pro shop.

Neatness doesn't relate to size, either; better an orderly small shop than a busy, messy big one. If the size of your pro shop demands that you follow the minimalist idea, so be it. Nobody enjoys bouncing off walls or displays. Nobody likes being forced to sign up for his or her round in a congested area while another golfer is inspecting the latest, greatest golf club and yet another is booking a lesson.

And speaking of lessons, or other programs that the club offers, how about drawing attention to them in a pleasing and clear way? Too many pro shops don't bother with appealing graphics. The PGA National Golf Club announces its upcoming clinics and clubfitting sessions in glass on a stand-alone unit at one entrance to the shop.

Here's another idea related to the theme of clarity and efficiency. How about separating men's and women's fashion sections, and include fitting rooms in both cases. The PGA National's pro shop also has a kiddie's corner that includes T-shirts for children, baby golf shoes, videos introducing youngsters to golf, and so on. Makes sense to me.

Suppliers of equipment and clothes should also be clearly identified with signs. Why should I wonder whether I'm looking at the Greg Norman Collection or Cutter and Buck or Descente or Izod? Let me know; I'm there to spend my money, so make it easy for me. Ditto for equipment displays-show me, clearly, simply.

A pro shop should also remind us that golf is a game rich in history and literature. Every shop should offer a selection of prints, posters, books and videos. And some thought should be put into the offerings. I've been turned off many times by a shop that doesn't bother to keep current with books and videos. That tells me the people running the shop don't care. Potential buyers deserve care. No other store would get away with such sloppiness. Why should a pro shop?

It shouldn't, and because golfers have more and more choices, it won't. So owner beware: Stay sharp, and keep your shop smart.