

Through the Green

"Get Linked - Play Golf"

NGCOA's New Player Development Program

by Jeff Calderwood, Executive Director, NGCOA Canada

The golf industry can look forward to a 1.5% increase in rounds per year and a 2.5% increase in the supply of courses per year over the next decade, according to the recent study by the National Golf Foundation.

You don't even need to open your Economics 101 textbooks to realize that this is a formula for a supply/ demand problem that leads to more vacant tee times and lower green fees. No doubt, you are already aware of new golf courses opening or planned in your market and have given thought to strategies required to cope with such increased competition.

The current RCGA Golf Participation Survey Report indicates that 20.5% of Canadians now golf and this is an increase from 19% 2 years ago. Although this is encouraging, it does not keep up with the number of new courses in most cities.

Since peaking in 1990, the supply of golf courses has been outpacing the demand. Golfers per course have now been reduced to 1986 levels. - Source: NGF

The opportunity, however, lies in the fact that many of the 79.5% who don't golf are quite likely to take up the game, given the right invitation. The demographic trends of Canadian society support this statement.

Professor David K. Foote, who wrote Boom, Bust & Echo 2000, explains that "A nation of young people is a society of hockey and tennis players. Evidence of golf's powerful appeal to older people is that golfers play more as they get older." The baby-boomers are clearly entering their prime golfing years and present one attractive target market to help resolve the anticipated supply/demand problem.

Since we have little control over the supply of golf courses, pro-active marketing to increase demand is the necessary solution and the National Golf Course Owners Association is taking a lead role in this respect. Get Linked - Play Golf is a professionally designed NGCOA marketing strategy to attract new players into the game at a faster rate. Print, radio and direct mail campaigns have been created for individual golf courses or NGCOA chapters to cooperatively execute within their own markets. The four target markets are youth, baby-boomers, parents and business professionals, and the Get Linked - Play Golf ads are very well designed to influence these potential golfers. The focus is on fun, entertainment, outdoor recreation, relaxation, physical and mental challenge and connections with family, friends and business associates.

In addition, the Get Linked - Play Golf campaign will alter the public's perception

that golf is too time consuming, expensive and intimidating. The NGCOA research identified these as the main perceived barriers to taking up golf.

To support the advertising campaign, effective new player programs should be available at each golf course which accommodate the needs of beginners. Get Linked - Play Golf includes proven programs that cater to these new golfers as well as database tracking systems to monitor the program.

During the NGCOA Canada summer board meeting, the board is considering strategies for national involvement of all golf courses in 2000. For 1999, any individual golf course may take advantage of the Get Linked - Play Golf strategy on their own and a cooperative media buy among 20 NGCOA Canada golf courses In Ottawa is being test marketed.

As these marketing strategies develop, I encourage all golf courses to participate in Get Linked - Play Golf. I suggest that the problem is real and a significant part of the solution can be our Get Linked - Play Golf campaign. This may well be the most important NGCOA Canada initiative we have ever undertaken.